Dale Johnson: This is an interview with Tom Haines on a history of the grocery business—the small grocery store—in Missoula and western Montana. Tom, how and when did you get into the grocery business?

Tom Haines: Well, I was more or less born in the grocery business. That is, my father was in the grocery business as were my grandfather and great-grandfather. So, [for] perhaps a hundred years back they were all in the grocery business. Of course this wasn’t in Montana. It was back in Illinois on the Mississippi River. Then my parents moved to Montana and my father had the general store at Clinton and I was a manager of a general store in Illinois. The general store burned in 1931 so we came to Montana—my wife and I and son. This was in the heart of the Depression. I borrowed $1000 from my father and $500 from the Missoula Mercantile Company and bought a grocery store. I arranged for a line of two weeks' credit with the Missoula Mercantile Company and that's how we got started.

That time, of course, was in the heart of the Depression—the worst of it. There was very little money. You got "relief orders" and that was the only kind of welfare there was at the time. The government—state and federal—took forever to pay. Well, if you had two weeks' credit in the Missoula Mercantile Company [they] had to be paid. In view of the fact you couldn't get your money for quite a length of time from the government you would assign these orders to the Mercantile and they would take them and give you credit on your account and they, in turn, had to wait to be paid.
Of course the Missoula Mercantile was the financial institution of western Montana. They did a bigger banking business than all the banks put together. They were in a position that they could help the retailers out in Montana to keep going. Also, it helped the people that needed the welfare—the relief orders—and it helped the government. They [government] were just getting things started and didn't really know how to handle it. They [Missoula Mercantile] helped everybody out.

DJ: The name of your store was the OK Trading Company?

TH: The OK Trading Company, yes. It had been there for about ten or fifteen years before I bought it. The man that had started it had had a saloon in St. Joseph, Missouri and had called it the OK Saloon. He was so successful that he decided' to call the store the OK Trading Company.

DJ: Now the Missoula Mercantile had a retail grocery at this time...

TH: They had a retail grocery which was the largest grocery in town. It was down in a building now occupied by the Bon. It was a beautiful "fancy" grocery store. It was "charge and delivery." Everything was charged or you could [charge]. They carried a complete line of vegetables when vegetables were more or less in their infancy [in local stores]. It was the leading grocery store in western Montana.

DJ How were they to compete with?

TH: They were very easy to compete with because they didn't undercut anybody because they were also in the wholesale grocery business at the same time. They were in competition with you on the one level yet you were buying your groceries from them at the wholesale level so they were easy competition. They didn't cut price. There wasn't any price cutting and there was no competition really until the chain stores started to come in. Of course the chains were already in here when I came in. They were the competition. That brought about the founding and the formation of the Red and White stores which was a co-operative group of stores — co-operative buying and advertising—to compete with the chain stores. Of course it [Red and White stores]
was sponsored by the Missoula Mercantile Company and operated for many years and was successful in competition with the chains.

DJ: Were there any other wholesalers in this part of Montana?

TH Yes, there was the Western Wholesale Grocery at the time. I can't recall whether Stone Ordean Wells Company was still in business or not. That was a chain wholesale grocery headquartered in Duluth. I think Missoula was about as far west as they went. They were in business then and later the Missoula Mercantile company bought them out. Then they went over and occupied the building they had on Rose Avenue, north of the tracks. The Western States Wholesale Grocery Company was more or less the chain store wholesale here and it was later sold to Haines—H.L. Haines (no relation to me).

DJ: At this time did most people do their buying at the corner grocery?

TH: Yes. Missoula was covered all over with corner groceries, or neighborhood groceries, as they were called. Of course our grocery serviced the entire town. We didn't go across the river much though we had a few customers north of the bridge. It was charge and delivery and up until the war [WWII] we made three deliveries a day. When the war came we cut down to one delivery a day. It worked out very well because we were trying to get away from three deliveries a day because it was being abused... women would have three deliveries a day...they would go to the telephone, call up , and we would take a spool of thread out to them. So one good thing came out of the war...it eliminated that overabundance of deliveries and cut down to one a day. Of course, if we got a truck load of groceries together the truck was started out and then it would come back for more. We took deliveries out as we got them in.

DJ: Did most people buy by telephone in those days?

TH: About eighty percent of our business was by telephone. We had customers that I had never seen. We had three telephones that incoming calls could come in on at peak times and they would all be in use. Orders were written on a sales slip, handed to one of the boys or girls to
make the rounds of the store to make the order up. Then it was put in boxes—delivery boxes — stacked in the back room and then they started out with the truck to be delivered to the house. Practically everything was charged. We had a few customers that you delivered to who would pay. Very few. They were nearly all charge and you seldom even saw these customers. But we made it a point that anything that went out of the grocery store to these customers was always the best...like fruits and vegetables or meat. Nothing shoddy ever went out! Nothing would make them [customers] madder than if I tried to pawn something off. And if they called in [for something] and we didn't have it in the store then we would get it even if we had to scour the town to find the item...we'd get it. An order that went out of the store was always filled. If the merchandise was in Missoula we would have it. Lots of times we would have to go clear downtown to the Missoula Mercantile Company to get something in the way of fresh vegetables... they would be the only people in town that would have it.

DJ: Where did you buy meat? Was that from the Missoula Mercantile or Daily?

TH: Principally from the John R. Daily Company... that is, fresh meat we bought from John R. Daily company. Salt meats and smoked meats we would buy principally from John Morrell Company and some from Hansons—the old Hanson Packing Company—in Butte and some from Armour out of Spokane.

DJ: What were the credit policies regarding grocery stores at that time?

TH: Well, we were very strict. When I started in I didn't know a thing about it...I had never handled credit. The first few months they just almost broke me...I was in terrible shape. Mr. Lou Bunge was the Vice President, General Credit Manager and Treasurer of the Missoula Mercantile. He would call me down on the carpet there and explain to me, "You had better have the groceries on the shelf than in somebody's stomach." He was right.

Of course we had a policy ...we collected the account the day we opened the account... that is, we sat down with the customer when they wanted to open an account and we had the iron clad rule that such and such a time the bill was to be paid. If they paid every two weeks then we settled the bill at that time...or once a month or whatever it happened to be. We adhered to that. If
they didn't pay we stopped the account. If they had some good excuse why we might extend the credit. Later, as I more or less got on my feet a little, [if] they wouldn't have the money then someone would come (they would have perhaps had some illness in the family or something had happened that they couldn't pay they account,) and I would arrange with them that I would give them the money to pay that account and take their note. I would count the money out to them, they would count the money out back to me to pay for the account, they would sign the note and we would start a new account. That note would have a schedule for payment...it might be a dollar a week or two dollars a week or whatever. The accounts were kept current. In twenty-four years and one week of business I finally only lost $1800 in bad credit out of hundreds of dollars' worth of credit, where credit was extended.

DJ: Are there any grocery stores that operate on credit anymore?

TH: None that I know of. There may be a few in the country but none in Missoula that I know of. I don't know of any of the stores in the country that do either... that is the grocery part. Now some of these general stores out in the country that might sell hardware and things like that on credit and contracts, and that type of thing...but just the old time go-in-and-charge grocery, no way. It is impossible. You see, the grocer pays for those groceries. When they come in the back door he has a check for that deliveryman... it is all on a cash basis and there is no other way that they can handle it.

DJ: Did grocery stores at that time handle strictly groceries? What about baked goods?

TH Yes, they weren't the general-type store that we have now. Just a little bit more about this...they didn't handle drugs or anything... but back quite a few years ago the old Missoula Drug shipped in a lot of White King soap powder which was very popular... one of the first soap powders on the market. They shipped in this White King soap powder and also Hills Brothers coffee which was one of the first vacuumed-packed coffees on the market. They shipped those two items into their drug store on the corner downtown and cut the price away down and made a big sale out of it — splash — to sell this stuff. Every grocery store [owner] in Missoula was hot under the collar about it so from that time on they started putting drugs in their grocery stores...
that is, packaged medicines like aspirin and cough syrups and that sort of thing. So there was a lawsuit that went up to the Supreme Court here in Montana as to whether or not grocery stores could sell drugs without a pharmaceutical license or a pharmacist on duty. The Supreme Court held that you could. So we won that lawsuit which is on the books today in that case. They brought that thing on themselves. From that time on the grocery stores began more or less gradually drifting into other things... other lines of merchandise. Today many of the grocery stores are really a general store.

DJ: When did the neighborhood grocery go down? Was this right after WWII?

TH: Yes, right after World War II they started disappearing. The larger markets started coming in though it wasn't particularly chains that ran them out of business. It was the larger market that had a complete line of groceries that changed their way of doing business. [They were] self-service... you went around and waited on yourself with the shopping cart and then checked out. Those were the things that apparently customers wanted. Many of the so-called "convenience" or neighborhood stores didn't roll with the times so they just finally faded out of the picture. Then the prices went down... mark-ups continued to decline in the grocery stores [and] it finally became a volume thing. You had to have volume. You had to have at least a minimum of $300,000 to stay [in business]... or $500,000 even better. So that's the reason why the corner convenience store gradually faded out of the picture.

DJ: Did the automobile and accessibility have anything to do with that?

TH: It may have had some, but not to a great extent. Yes, they did have something to do with it. Then, of course, even before they started to go out of the picture the automobile was still available and could be used [for] the same thing. People's habits just plain changed. They got over the idea of step to the telephone, call the grocer, put their order in and have it delivered. That idea just gradually faded away. You never know why those things will happen. People just change their habits and why, you never know. It just happens overnight.

DJ: Did the Missoula Mercantile underwrite a lot of grocery stores in western Montana?
TH: They used to. I don't know how far you would say "underwrite" but they were the bankers. They had an interest in many of the grocery stores...they perhaps owned some of the stock in it or things like that. They were very, very helpful if you played along with them (the Missoula Mercantile Company) or showed your interest... they would play along with you and they would bend over backwards to help you out financially any way they could. They were the tower of strength in western Montana as far as I am concerned and as far as the grocery business is concerned... and also the banking business... because you could go to them and borrow money at six percent and sign your name to the note and that was it. Of course there were many ranchers and people like that who would just leave their money there on credit on their accounts and they could draw against it...for all intents and purposes they were a bank.

DJ: Did the local grocer buy fruits and vegetables locally during the summer season?

TH: Summer, yes. During the summer season he would buy them locally if they had them available. Fruits and vegetables were bought from the Pacific Fruit and Produce here. They were the primary source.

DJ: Now, what about baked goods? I suppose there were bakeries?

TH: Of course. Years ago we had two or three small bakeries in town. They would deliver some of the baked goods around town. Eddy's, of course, was the principle supplier, and there was the Bon Ton Bakery... they were the two principal suppliers of bread and pastry. Of course the in-store bakery in the grocery store was a thing that was unheard of in that day. They didn't know anything about it. Those were the days before the frozen dough and the electric oven and those things. It's a complete new thing.

DJ: Each grocer must have been a butcher also?

TH: Most of them were, yes. You almost had to be.
Susan Buchel: About refrigeration... what types of problems did you have?

TH: It was ice. Fifty years ago it was all ice refrigeration. Gradually mechanical refrigeration came in and it, of course, then replaced the ice.

SB: Was there a major ice supplier in town?

TH: Yes, the Missoula Ice Company right over here across the river.

SB: What kind of an operation was it? It seems to me it would be a rather messy operation.

TH: They manufactured the ice...they had the manufacturing machine plant. They delivered the ice in around three hundred pound blocks. You put it in the refrigerator and...you've never seen an ice refrigerator in a home?

SB: How long does a three hundred pound block of ice last?

TH: Depends on how much you have the case open.

SB: About the Red and White group...

TH: The Red and White stores...it was a group—voluntary group—which banded together. They had co-operative advertising. We had the advertisements in The Missoulian and the western Montana newspapers once a week. We paid for it on a percentage of our volume. I think we paid one half of one percent of our sales. That went toward the advertising. And, of course, we had cooperative buying. That was all handled through the Missoula Mercantile Company.

   We had an advertising committee that met once a week and set up the ads. We knew who was going to advertise and at one time we even gave away automobiles and for every fifty cent purchase you got a ticket. You either paid the account or, on actual cash purchase, you got a ticket. Every month we would give away an automobile. We would give it away down at the Wilma Theater. We drew a ticket out and we knew by the ticket numbers where these tickets
were... whether it was western Montana or where these tickets were. If it wasn't called for right
then and there, we would draw several and they had so many days to claim the car. If it wasn't
claimed, then we'd draw another number and go right on down the line. It was usually the first
one that was called because it created great interest. It was so successful, and we developed such
a sum of money through sales, we were giving a car away about every week or two. Then you
started giving away other things... washing machines and all those things along with it. Also, if
we had a slow account we'd give double tickets for a day to get them to pay the account.

We were so successful with it and we were just clobbering all the other stores in town—
chain stores and everybody else in western Montana--we had all the business. Of course, they
had to get into the automobile act too. When they got into it, well, it killed the punch...so then, of
course, we stepped out of it. Nobody had any advertising advantages or sales advantages so then
we stopped and, of course, they stopped because it was getting very expensive for them...they
didn't have the volume to start giving that many cars away.

SB: When you say that there were groceries all over western Montana, about how many were in
that association?

TH: We had fifty some stores in the Red and White group.

SB: When was this?

TH: The opening? We opened on August 31, 1932...the opening ad of the Red and White stores.

SB: What were some of the chain stores in the area?

TH: There was Skaggs and Marr...there was another one, but I can't remember. Safeway wasn't
here.

SB: Did you notice through the years that you had your store if there was a stratification of what
kind of people went to the different types of store? Did one group of people always go to the
Mercantile and another go to your stores?
TH: Not particularly, no...because it was a cross section of all people from all walks of life in Missoula... all financial strata and everything else. We did not have one special group. As I recall no store did at that time. Of course, the Missoula Mercantile Company naturally had more of the wealthy people in Missoula, although we had quite a few of them too. We figured we had our share. No, there was never any one certain group that traded at any one certain store that I ever had any idea about.

DJ: When did Red and White go out?

TH: It went out when the Missoula Mercantile Company sold the wholesale grocery to the Utah Wholesale Grocery. Then they killed it off right overnight.

DJ: Did IGA succeed that?

TH: Later, sometime later, IGA came in. Of course the Red and White stores are still functional over the United States. I don't know whether there are any in the northwest any more or not, but back east and in the middle west they are very strong.

SB: Had you gotten your idea of the Red and White from some other group like this?

TH: Yes. It was established by the S.M. Flickinger Company in Buffalo, New York. They were the original and we got the idea from them.

SB: Then did your group become part of that large organization or was that entirely separate?

TH: Well, it was more or less separate. Of course, the wholesale grocers sponsored them...they had the organization... sort of a parent organization. Of course, they went out and made the contacts to buy. We had our own labels...we had red and while labels, blue and white labels... like for salad dressing we had Sun Spun... things like that. We had our own labels and they would go out and contact the manufacturers to supply us with these things. I know the coffee was
manufactured by a firm by the name of Jones-Thurbach down in San Francisco and spices were manufactured by the old Wadhams Company down in Portland, Oregon.

Barbara Parker: Did you carry ethnic items like specific spices for people in the neighborhood who might have...my mother used to buy saffron...so would you have something like that?

TH: Oh, yes.

BP: For Syrians or somebody like this?

TH: Oh, yes. Then we also carried cumin for the Mexicans and people like that.

BP: Did you have to special order those spices?

TH: Oh, no, we stocked it and it was part of the regular stock. Those people bought it and then, of course, I guess they think of it as an ethnic group thing at the time but after a while gradually everybody bought it and as far as saffron was concerned people got used to it and liked it. I'd never heard of saffron until I came there. I started eating saffron cakes and buns and got to like it. Cumin, of course, is a flavoring for chili...if you don't have cumin in it you don't have chili flavoring.

BP: I also remember sawdust on the floor.

TH: Yes, they used to have that around meat blocks... that was around to pick up the pieces of meat. That's strictly against the law today, which it should have been a long time ago. It was done for two things...to pick up the scraps of meat and other things so that people wouldn't step on them and fall down. It could be slick and the butcher would step on them and hit the floor.

BP: How many employees did you have in the grocery store?
TH: I had six altogether. We used a lot of university students out here. They might work one to four hours a day and they were very good help.

BP: Did you do the hiring of these employee? Did you have any young women working for you?

TH: Yes, if they wanted to work.

END OF SIDE ONE
BEGIN SIDE TWO

TH: ...was downtown, of course, the Missoula Mercantile and then there were two or three chains downtown... that's where the chains were. The Worden Company and one or two that I have forgotten ... they were all downtown... they thought you had to be on the Avenue [Higgins]. There used to be one called the Bright Spot Grocery. It was a real nice grocery store and it was all charge and delivery.

In those days the railroads would accept shipment of groceries to outlying [areas] like for section hands and people like that. That was called deadheading. You would take the groceries down to the depot, have that person's name written on it and which section it was going to. Then the passenger trains would pick them up and drop them off. It didn't cost anything... it was a service that they [railroads] gave to their employees. Of course we would fill the order. I recall one time we had a Greek section foreman down at East Portal on the Milwaukee. They had a baby. In those days they fed babies on Eagle Brand milk. That order came in late Saturday for Eagle Brand milk — a big order of it. We only had about a dozen cans or half a dozen cans so we had to scour the town to get enough Eagle Brand milk together to fill that order so that kid wouldn't starve. I guess they don't do that today. (I don't know too many people who feed their babies Eagle Brand because it's nothing but sugar and milk and not good for them.) Times have changed.

BP: Were you in the grocery business when the controversy over butter versus margarine was quite evident?
TH: Yes, very much so.

BP: How did the consumers react to that?

TH: Well, of course the consumers wanted the colored margarine...the first margarine was white margarine...you had a little capsule that you would break and add the butter flavor [color]. Then they got the package [plastic] that had the little capsule inside and you would break that [little capsule] and mix it by squeezing the bag. When I first went into the legislature, I introduced the bill to permit the sale of colored margarine. Well, I didn't know the ropes. The bill was placed in the committee on agriculture. The farmers and the dairymen were in cahoots and they killed the bill right now. Well, by the next session of the legislature I had smarted up and knew what to do. I went to the Speaker when I introduced the bill...there was a small tax on it at that time so I asked the Speaker if they wouldn't put the bill into the committee on ways and means. From there I took it on through the legislature and it was passed. It got to the governor's desk. (Hugo Aaronson was governor at the time.) You might have known Shell Sweet in fact, one of his granddaughters married a cousin of mine. Anyway, he jumped the gun and started selling Nucco before the bill was signed. Hugo found out about it. Hugo said, "I refuse to sign that bill." And he wasn't going to sign it either. So to get the bill signed we had to go to Hugo's wife and persuade her to go twist Hugo's arm to get the damn bill signed. So we got the bill signed. From then on everybody had colored margarine in Montana.

I used that as a gimmick to get elected for years around here. I'd just go out and tell the housewife, "Look, I'm the knight in shining armor...I got you colored margarine... vote for me." They'd vote for me whether I did anything else or not. I'd go over and do anything I wanted yet they would vote for me on that colored margarine.

SB: If people were able to call in their grocery orders there must not have been too much trouble with different brands of the same product?

TH: Well, they would just tell you what they wanted. If they didn't tell you, you would just give them whatever they...you might just have one brand of one certain item...many things, like tomatoes, we might have two or three different brands. Well, they would have their preference...
and then I would say, "I have Del Monte tomatoes and Wood Cross tomatoes." They would say, "I want such and such tomatoes." That's what you gave them. If it was a customer that was real tight about the thing you got it for them if you didn't happen to have it. We had what we called "pickups"... we'd maybe go down to the Mercantile or some other store in town and get "pickups". You knew your customers on your orders... like we had a customer that wanted pork chops... well, each one of those pork chops had to be put in a piece of paper and they had to be laid along just so. When the delivery boy got there she would open it up and look at it and see that it had been done right. Little peculiarities... women have many peculiarities about cooking and about orders and groceries and things like that. You got so you knew them...the person that took the orders knew, the delivery boy knew. Then they would come back and report to us what Mrs. so-and-so said about her order and if she griped about something. Then, of course, the deliveryman,...[we] had to warn them not to stop and have coffee and cake and cookies. They always wanted to feed the deliveryman... especially if we had a real handsome deliveryman or boy...some university student. These women would drool over him and they wanted to feed him everything and you never got any work done.

SB: Could you tell how often someone would order groceries?

TH: Well, we pretty well knew some women's habits. Some women would have an order three times a day. Some of them would order just once a week, some twice a week, and then we had some customers that would order once a month. On the first of the month they would have an enormous bill of groceries. They would say, "Well, we do that and then we don't spend so much money for groceries." There was some logic to their thinking on that thing. They started running short and they would cut down on what the family was eating. They just didn't go to the grocery store and get anything. They might come in to get a few fill-ins at the end of the month or the period that they would order groceries for. Every women was different and you could take women that had say $500 a month (their husband's income) and one family would live high on the hog on that money and would have money left and the other woman would be in debt all the time and they couldn't keep things above water. No two women knew how to manage a household. We knew them all. We could tell...we'd say, "Mrs. so-an-so, she's going hog wild on an order of something." Then some women, they would check every order and when they came...
in to pay their grocery bill it was right down to the penny and they knew exactly what it was. It would always be what you had [on the books] too. Very good books. Others would care less.

BP: What did you do with fruits and vegetables that you couldn't sell or meat that became a little bit tainted. Was there an outlet to get rid of it?

TH: I ate a lot of that. No, if we saw that it was going to spoil we put a price on it and sold it. If it was meat and we saw that it was going to slip or we figured we could get rid of it we would put a price on it and get something out of it. The same with fruits and vegetables. We'd sell it. Everybody does that.

BP: You didn't have a farm or a pig farm or somebody that came in and collected that?

TH: It's against the law to feed pigs slop from restaurants and grocery stores, hotels and things.

I have an OK Trading Company box hanging in my garage that I salvaged. Each store had their own deliverymen and these boys sometimes would tear up trucks and they would "ram" around with them and steal each other's delivery boxes. I have seen more fist fights around wholesale houses between the delivery boys that thought somebody had stolen their delivery boxes out of their truck. They were always disappearing. In those days a delivery box cost about $2.50 to $3.00 each. The housewife [customer] would take them and keep them. If you left a box of groceries there you probably never saw the box again. They would put it down in the basement...a great thing to pack stuff around the house in...very handy. Well, if one delivery man found some other delivery man's box...got one of his boxes...they'd have a knock-down, drag-out right then and there.

There were lots of funny things around the store. Of course, we would always be playing pranks on each other around the store. Especially the young kids. I hired as many university students as I could and they were always energetic. Full of pep and beans... playing pranks on each other. We always entered into it. It was part, I guess, of the espirit de corps...just good will amongst the employees and everybody enjoyed it.
BP: At the end of the day did you make one trip to the bank from the cash drawer or how did you handle the money?

TH: That was always a big problem back in those days. You see, you couldn't get into the banks to get rid of this money on Saturday night and things like that. The Mercantile... we would dash down about five o'clock in the evening, just about closing time, and take down a lot of checks or if we had an overabundance of currency, we'd take it down and they [Mercantile] would give us credit for it. We didn't want to carry it around over the weekend. But we were closed on Sundays. If we would run out of money, like the first of the month cashing a lot of checks, and the banks would be closed at three o'clock, well, we would go down to the Mercantile and get money...we'd trade checks in for money to get cash. If we had anything left toward the evening we would take it down there to get rid of it. We didn't want to carry it because around the first of the month you would have several thousands of dollars on hand right now when people were paying their bills. The rest of the time it might not amount to too much and you could go ahead and pack it around or hide it in the store. Every once in a while I would forget where I had hidden the darn stuff and have a heck of a time finding it. The currency and checks you always kept and knew where they were. We had a safe in the store and the combination of the safe was written on the front of the safe so if anybody wanted to get in they could open it up. The only thing that was in there was the store books—the ledgers—that's the only thing. During the day we would keep money in there but not at night.

BP: Did you keep the books for the store?

TH: My wife did...she was a bookkeeper. She kept the books and the charge accounts and that's all she did. If she were gone or ill or something we would have another person in the neighborhood come in and take care of it for us.

SB: These days stores seem to be open from seven in the morning until eleven at night. Do you remember the hours you were open? Did they stay the same or change through the year?
TH: Well, it was just a gradual thing. We kept opening up longer and longer. Shopping habits changed. People would go to church and want to come and do their shopping after they had gone to church on Sunday. The store stayed open to accommodate them. We always opened at eight o'clock in the morning and closed at six in the evening. We closed every Sunday and holiday. Most of the stores in town did in those days too...none of this open on Sundays. Missoula was pretty well closed down on Sunday.

SB When did this change?

TH After the war it started changing... war changed a lot of things. In town here was one of the better grocery stores (after the Missoula Mercantile Company). They were down town right across the street from the H.O. Bell Company. They ran a very fine grocery store, the K & W (Karkenan and Wagnitz) and did for many, many years. After the Missoula Mercantile Company it was the number two store in town. Then, of course, it was all charge and delivery. One time, the deepest snow that I ever saw in Missoula, back in the late '30s in February, and the town was just blocked. We were fortunate enough to keep our delivery truck going. I had a couple of fellows on the truck. They had to pack these groceries a long ways. It only lasted three or four days and most of the delivery trucks were just plain stranded out in a snow drift somewhere. A lot of people would call in because they knew we delivered. We took all the orders. We picked up a few customers... new customers... that way because they felt, "well, they took care of us in this storm." But then, of course, many of them didn't. We always bent over backwards to accommodate these delivery customers because they were the cream of the crop as far as working and because it was the bulk of the business. Whatever they wanted we saw that they got it.

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