

The perfect spot for the store faced Route 66, and the building would sit on the north side of the highway. Most travelers were coming west, and it would be a highly visible and logical location. There was a buzz of excitement about planning the store. I was amazed at Dad's ingenuity. What he lacked in cash he made up for in creativity. He heard there was a stockpile of ammunition boxes for sale at Ft. Wingate, which lies just east of Gallup, New Mexico. Ft. Wingate had served as an ammunition depot during WWII, so there were lots of these thick, heavy, natural pine crates approximately three feet long by a foot square — and they were selling for about 25 cents each. Dad's price range! He bought several loads and hauled them back to Lupton.

The ammunition boxes were stenciled with different letters or numbers, and I asked him what they meant.

"Those are ordnance numbers, son. You see," he said pointing to the lettering, "These held 30-caliber and those M-1's."

I watched the sturdy crates become the framework of the store. Friends from the Inspection Station and relatives from Holbrook helped nail the boxes together, one on top of the other, then connected sections, side by side. The building took on a nice rectangular shape that resembled the dimensions of the ammunition boxes. The store stretched about 60 feet across the front and 20 feet deep. With cheap lumber and white plaster, they finished the inside and outside walls, assembled a wooden floor, and supported the flat roof with two-by-fours, topped with plywood and roofing paper.

Dad installed a propane tank, then dug a small well by hand. We couldn't get any water, though, so we had to haul it from the well next to the railroad section house. Inside the store, a crank-up phone connected us to the operator. Outside, an outhouse connected us to reality. Dad put up a basketball hoop close by and from then on basketball consumed every free moment we had.

A small living area at the back of the store had one bedroom for Mom and Dad and the new baby, my brother Denny. Armand, Maxie, Aggie, and I stayed in a little shack behind the store. It was comfortable that first summer, but even the wood stove in there barely broke the chill when the freezing winter months hit. Later Dad bought a railroad house close by for more room.

Dad had a local Navajo artist letter "Indian Trails Trading Post" across the front of the building and paint colorful thunderbirds, kachinas, and rainbow *Yei* dancers, all around, as well as bright signs for curios and gasoline.





At the far end of the building stood two gravity-fed gas pumps — one for regular, one for ethyl — gas sold at about 24 cents a gallon, unless there was a gas war and the prices dropped. Later, Dad built a gas house of cinder block near the pumps for supplies, oil, and tires.

Inside the store, they hammered up shelves and built a

counter where Dad put an adding machine with a cash box attached.

We helped pound homemade signs into the hard earth along the highway— signs letting travelers know we had gasoline, curios, food. We boys would pump gas and help mark merchandise and stock shelves.

The Navajos were a key element of the business, too. They needed a convenient place to trade for food and supplies, plus the store saved them the 20-mile wagon trip to Gallup.