



THE PIONEER MERCHANT

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An important factor in the development of the cattle business in Arizona was the pioneer merchant. The cowboy could, and did, live largely on beef and jerky, but he needed more and more "store-bought" goods as home ranches became permanent and replaced the trail camps of those early stockmen who "trailed" their cattle into Arizona from the East and from California.

One of these pioneer merchants was the late James I. Gardner of Prescott, who came to Arizona via burro pack train in 1879 from the end of the railroad at Trini-

dad, Colorado. Mr. Gardner worked at various jobs while getting together the necessary capital to go into business for himself: as a "hand" at a sawmill, as a teamster, and as a clerk in the store of another early merchant, Joe Dougherty; he even herded sheep one summer.

He first opened his own store on October 1st, 1883, on the ground floor of the old Cliff House, which was on the present site of the Bukove Motor Company. In 1890 he built his own store building on the northeast corner of Willis and Cortez Streets—that building still stands.



Before the railroad came to Prescott in 1890, local merchants received their supplies by freight from Ehrenburgh on the Colorado River, the goods having been shipped by boat from Los Angeles or San Francisco around Lower California and up the Colorado River to Ehrenburgh.

An interesting story, in this connection, concerned a shipment of candy which Mr. Gardner received one Christmas day, probably in 1883. There was no other candy in Prescott, so Mr. Gardner opened his store Christmas morning and sold all the candy before noon—some thirty wooden buckets of it, each weighing thirty pounds. The candy was, of course, the old-fashioned kind, striped sticks, hoarhound, gum drops, and jelly beans. Mr. Gardner limited the purchases to one pound per customer unless the customer had children; then he could buy one pound for each child—an early example of rationing on account of scarcity. Incidentally, the candy sold for One Dollar per pound. The freight rate

a tax attorney. It is true that the merchant of today would not approve such long-time credit without security or collateral of some sort; his banker wouldn't let him. But the pioneer merchant was secure in the high integrity of the old-time cowman; when the steers were sold, the cowman paid his bill and that was that. A man's word was good and no scrap of paper could make it any better.

The modern city housewife would be amazed at the quantity of groceries the cowman and his good wife bought at one time. They didn't shop this afternoon for tonight's dinner. They came to town maybe once a month, or less often. If they lived near the railroad, they would send in large orders by mail to be shipped local freight to waystations on the Santa Fe, Prescott and Phoenix Railway or on The Prescott and Eastern. If they lived in an area distant from the railroad, say Williamson Valley or Camp Wood, they came to town in the Studebaker wagon and hauled home a load of supplies to last a month or more. Flour by the hundred pounds, canned



Early-day Gardner store in Prescott

from Ehrenburgh by wagon was very high and the pioneer merchant operated on a high mark-up.

The cowman could supply all his needs at Gardner's: coffee, flour, sugar, canned goods, horseshoes, hay, grain, salt, boots, shirts and Levis, pots, pans, and dishes, in fact, anything a rancher could need.

Best of all, Mr. Gardner would extend credit, "carry" his customers until they sold their steers. Many a cowman has been eased over some very hard times, dry years, low-priced cattle, or personal misfortune by the willingness of the pioneer merchant to "carry him."

Although this practice was often quite hard on the old-time merchant, he was in a better position to allow extended credit than the merchant of today. His margin of profit was far greater for he was not beset by income taxes, sales taxes, luxury taxes, withholding taxes, social security taxes, and all that host of accounting "Heelflies" that plague the modern businessman. Your pioneer merchant kept a simple ledger and cash book *himself*, and did not need the services of a certified public accountant and

goods by the case, horseshoes by the keg, and other items.

Any day at Gardner's store ranch wagons could be seen loading up; in the afternoon large drays drawn by Percheron horses would haul shipments from the store to the Santa Fe freight depot to meet the four o'clock deadline for local freight.

James I. Gardner closed his store and retired from business on April 1st, 1918, to the tune of loud laments from Yavapai County cattlemen. His was a personal business, not a company, and the names in his old ledgers are of historic significance in the annals of Yavapai County's cattle industry.

There were pioneer merchants in every county of Arizona, each contributing his share in developing the cow business and, among those of the day, Gardner's store was outstanding in Yavapai County for its long years of neighborly service to the stockmen. The old-fashioned general merchandise store is rapidly becoming a thing of the past, but the store of James I. Gardner at Prescott will not be forgotten.