

## My Earliest Memories of Chester

*by Pat Ludwig*

My earliest memory of Chester was actually years before I ever moved here. It was part of my introduction to the hi-line and a new life as a bride. I came to the doctor for an appointment and as we drove down the side street, I was aware of the unpaved streets and later, as we stopped for coffee, I was painfully aware of the dingy signs and store fronts. I was further dismayed at the interior of the restaurant. I felt like I had stepped back into history, the time of early settlers. It was so un-modern.

This was 1957 and I had come from a city West of the mountains to a small farming community a few miles down the road. When we said we were going to Chester where the doctor practiced and where there was a hospital, I had expected it to be something more.

My perception of Chester did not change until 12 years later when I decided to go back to teaching and I came to Chester to interview for the second grade position. My first impressions of the school were much more favorable as I was delighted to see the pride that was evident in the cleanliness of the school. I was impressed with the teaching tools that were afforded for their teachers, and I was also impressed with the friendliness of the school personnel. The Superintendent at the time was Con Murphy and he had been in Chester for several years. He and his wife Rose Mary lived in the house supplied by the district. They had two young children, the oldest Michael was in my class a couple years later.

My perspective was modified further as we began looking for a place to live here in town. I had four school age daughters and I felt that I wanted to have them going to school where I was employed and that meant moving from a house we had built only a few years previously to something suitable in Chester. As I walked about the town, and visited the stores, I was amazed at the transformation—at least in my mind. This was a proud and busy community. Residents took pride in showing me what was here and well as explaining the many opportunities that existed. Many merchants had spent a good deal of money to update both the exterior and the interior of their businesses. This was pointed out repeatedly and everyone tried to be helpful. The hospital had been built a few years before and Dr. Richard Buker was the main doctor. He delivered my first baby and at this writing is still practicing here in Chester. Several other doctors have come and gone and through the years we have had a fine facility. At one time his brother, Gerald joined his practice and he lived with his family in Chester

while his girls grew up and graduated. I am thinking that all 3 girls did graduate from Chester High.

We did find a house with enough room for each of the girls to have their own space. The rent was fair and we were ready to move in. The house we settled for was very close to the hospital and I soon learned how friendly and helpful these people were, encouraging us to visit the patients and staff as well as being available for questions about where to go and what to look for when we got there.

There were three grocery stores at that time and I really need to explain them a little more as each was unique. Before I had actually moved here, I had been to the County Market, the largest of the three located on highway two on the far east end of town. It seemed to have a good supply of every day needs and the prices were fair. At this time I can't remember who worked there but I do remember the clerks at the little market near the bank. It was owned and run by O. D. Gifford. I ran in and out of this store more because it was convenient for quick items needed in a hurry. The third store was The Chester Trading Co., often called the Green Store and I am sure that that store and the building itself held remnants of the whole history of Chester and a complete story in itself. This is an earlier picture of the Green Store.



My involvement with the Green store was limited to a once a week run through to pick up specials. I did limit myself to the specials as some of the staple items had been on the shelves for so many years that the product was unusable. And as time went on its demise was inevitable especially after the proprietor, Charlie Baker died.

With 4 school age daughters and a full time teaching position, most of my time was spent at school. My youngest daughter, Jeri was in the first grade and my hardest moments that first year were during the lunch period as I came into the lunchroom with my second graders shortly after the first graders had begun to eat. Almost every day, the first thing I saw was my daughter sobbing at the table because she couldn't (wouldn't) eat the lunch. The rest of us really enjoyed the meals. They were tasty, nutritious and at least once a week, the aroma of Ruth Eveland's famous cinnamon rolls drifted through the halls of grade school and high school. Needless to say, I gave in early to Jeri's demonstrations and after the first two weeks, she made her own peanut butter and jelly sandwich each morning as the rest of us scurried

around the house finding suitable attire for the day. In those days, girls still wore dresses or dressy pants to school (with shorts or pants under to provide warmth and modesty on the playground).

During the time I have lived here many improvements have been made in the community. The hospital has gone through several changes. When my girls were born, there was a hospital wing and a nursing home wing. We came up from Ruddyard over a cracked highway for our Doctor appointments and for any necessary hospitalization. When I had my babies, I usually came as soon as it was apparent that the baby was coming. Then for the next few hours, I went through labor in a start little room just off the operating room. My husband was allowed to sit with me, visiting and listening to my ordeal, but when the birth was imminent, he had to go to the waiting room and I was rolled into the delivery room. Now dad can be a part of the whole process and is part of the delivery team. Not only have methods really improved, but so has the facility. A clinic has been added, a new wing for hospital patients was built and most recently, three nursing home wings were added to provide space for the ever growing number of seniors requiring such care. The original two wings are used for office space and an extended care center.

When the clinic was added on to the hospital, space was provided for other offices and eventually a pharmacy, and a dentist practice were incorporated into the facility. These offices are continually being improved and the environment has kept pace with practices around the area. An optometrist has an up-to-date office and is here two days a week and there are three doctors to take care of the sick.

I started my teaching career in Chester with a second grade class. That first year, my class was at the far east end of the school. I had to walk through the other second grade to get to any other part of the building and when I took the class to another area, we had to go so very quietly so as not to disturb the class. Carolyn Frederickson was the other teacher and we were able coordinate many activities.

The next year and for several after that, we were housed "up on the hill." This was another concept that was foreign to me as the building we were in was located about 2 blocks west of the school and the road did have a slight incline, but I would never have considered this to be a hill. Each day we had to walk our students down the hill to the big school where we ate lunch and had a noon recess. Carolyn quit teaching after about two years to raise her family. Marilyn O'Day was hired in her place. There were two classrooms in this building, one was quite small and the other fairly large so each year I had to move so that

we had equal time in the large room. We had a full basement beneath the building which we put to use for several of our larger projects. Almost every year we did a unit on Mexico and when we did, we would convert the basement into a Mexican market place with appropriate stalls. As a culmination of the unit, we would have a large fiesta, getting dressed up for the affair and preparing tasty samples of what we imagined they might serve. One year we even built an adobe house out of mud mixed with straw. Another year, I had a student teacher, Judy Tempel and she got involved in the unit along with the rest of us. What fun.

We continued teaching there until there was enough room for all the classrooms to be in the original building. By this time there was only one second grade and I taught the same grade until Mrs. Hall retired and then I changed to first grade where I stayed for 12 years. During this period of time, my girls had gone from primary students through high school. My room was located in a part of the building which connects the high school and the grade school and it became our home away from home.

They were in various activities that kept them at school almost every late afternoon. They played basketball and were involved in track, and then became dedicated cheer leaders. My room was conveniently located for after school meetings and a changing room. Books could be deposited on my desk and we could all meet there in time to get home for dinner. We did work out a system whereby the first one home usually started something for dinner and we often all gathered around the dinning room table after supper, to do homework. We watched very little TV because there just wasn't time for it.