

Still-Active Owner Of Fienning's Market Recalls 50 Years In Grocery Business

By Carol Back

Richard Fienning has experienced every phase of the grocery business—from horse and wagon deliveries, to rationing problems during World War II, to modern-day packaged merchandising.

On Nov. 11 he will have owned and operated Fienning's Market at 332 South Eleventh St. for 50 years. He began in the store in September 1918.

"I intend to stay with it as long as I am physically and mentally able," the robust grocer stated. After 50 years he calls his grocery business "the big thing in my life." He and his wife reside at 330 South Eleventh St., their home adjoining the store.

Now serving as sole employe at the store, Fienning easily traces its history. Between 1890 and 1909 William Bockhoff, founder of National Automatic Tool Company (Natco), and John F. Bartel, Bartel's Hoosier Store founder, operated the small business.

Fienning's father, George H. Fienning, helped purchase the store in 1909. After partner Oscar Fienning entered the business. The father-son team continued until 1965 when the elder grocer died.

The younger Fienning initiated in 1925 the only remodeling ever done to the compact red brick building. He also proudly claims the first business telephone off Main Street in Richmond, installed around the turn of the century.

Opened At 5:45 A.M.

The oldest of 10 children, Fienning can remember opening the store at 5:45 a.m. Customers used to rise to do early morning shopping, he explained. Prior to opening, the then youthful grocer cared for the three horses used for delivery. The father-son team acquired its first delivery truck in 1919.

Fienning rather heatedly described rationing problems during World War II. Disgruntled customers unable to purchase supplies, his own problems obtaining meat, a summons before the rationing board and a compliance order "left me at my wit's end," he said.

He finally closed the store and retreated to the lake for a brief vacation. "Never have I enjoyed a week so much," he declared.

The most enjoyable time in his career? The end of World War II. He has a picture showing gay store decorations after V-J Day.

Milk 10 Cents Quart

A quart of milk, the grocer reminisced, cost 10 cents and bread sold two loaves for 15 cents at one time. Milk was sometimes delivered, unpasteurized, by a distributor hauling a 10-gallon can on his truck. People would have their containers filled from this.



Pictured above is Fienning's Market as it appeared in 1910, eight years before Richard Fienning entered the grocery business. Standing left to right, the first two people are outside

tifiable; following them are Ralph Hyde, David Owens, and the two men who then owned the store—George H. Fienning and Oscar Nolte.



Richard Fienning chats with his son, Dan, as the fiftieth anniversary of Fienning's Market nears. Dan, now assistant engineer for the city of Rich-

mond, helped operate the store pictured above, prior to 1950. (Palladium-Item Photo)

Fienning also said housewives were at first reluctant to buy bread that was sliced, considering it an insult to their own ability to slice it. Grocers were forced to carry the product both sliced and unsliced.

He stressed the growing complexity of handling groceries and the necessity of offering different brands, sizes and colors of the same item. What was formerly plain white paper goods, he said, has become multicolored, multisized and multipurposed.

He emphasized sizes in cigarettes as "the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard of." He refuses to carry the cigarette "a silly millimeter longer." He recalled helping to plan Richmond's only Food Show about 1933. Four blocks of North A Street — between Tenth and Fourteenth Streets — were blocked off and tented 77 food exhibitors, according to Fienning.

As times have changed, several customers remain. The grocer named Verl Pitts, 45 Grimes

Road, and Dr. Richard Ferguson of 426 South Eleventh St., as customers for over 35 years.

Fienning is the father of five grown children, all living in or near Richmond. His son Daniel of 930 South Eighteenth Place is assistant engineer for the city of Richmond. The grocer's four daughters are Mrs. Frances Hunt of Greenville, Ohio; Mrs. Janet Gatzek, 3711 East Main St.; Mrs. Wanda Mullin, 2230 North E St., and Mrs. Betty Coleman, 3025 Backmeyer Road.

Although at retirement age, Fienning considers "retirement nothing to look forward to." He declared he would miss the contact with the public and feels "fortunate to be in the position to make my own decision."

His decision? As many more years in the grocery business as possible.