

TALK, NARRATIVE AND SOCIAL INTERACTION
IN A CAPE BRETON GENERAL STORE

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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NATALIE DAWN MACPHERSON



TALK, NARRATIVE, and SOCIAL INTERACTION

IN A

CAPE BRETON GENERAL STORE

BY

© NATALIE DAWN MACPHERSON, B.A., M.L.I.S.

A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate
Studies in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
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Department of Folklore

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ABSTRACT

A portrait of a rural community and the attitudes and values held by the people of this community is documented through this study of talk, narrative and social interaction. The focus of this thesis is MacPherson's general store, located in Margaree Valley, Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. The contents include the history of the store and its merchants, the physical environment, and the socializing patterns which occur within it. The purpose of this study is to document the tradition of storytelling in Margaree Valley, to describe the context in which the storytelling takes place and to highlight the patterns of social behaviour associated with the art of communication.

As a native of the community and a member of the MacPherson family, the author provides an insider's perspective on talk, narrative and socializing patterns in Margaree Valley. Fieldwork was conducted from January to April, 1982. During this time period,

the author was involved in participant-observation fieldwork in the general store. Additional field notes were collected in 1978 and from May 1982 until June 1985. A total of seventeen formal interviews were also conducted.

The documented research indicates that the tradition of storytelling in Margaree Valley is changing but not dying. Narrative performances, once more common, have given way to more subtle narratives which are now imbedded in the routine daily conversations. MacPherson's general store is the focal point in the community from which one can observe patterns of socialization. It is an integral component of everyday socialization for members of Margaree Valley. As this environment has changed, so have the patterns of sociability. Observations indicate that storytelling is both versatile and flexible. It continues to adapt and adjust to changes in the environment in order to survive. The significance of the store's role to the community, and its relation to the author, have enabled her to present an intimate ethnographic study of socializing patterns in this Cape Breton community. The contents

are pertinent to anyone interested in the history of general stores, the function of general stores in a rural environment or the socializing patterns that have evolved within this setting.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	ix
CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER II - THE GENERAL STORE IN LITERATURE, ETHNOGRAPHY, AND FOLKLORE	10
CHAPTER III - FIELDWORK AND METHODOLOGY	41
CHAPTER IV - HISTORY	57
A. The community	58
B. The early years, 1909-1942	63
C. The middle years, 1942-1978	94
D. The recent years, 1978-1985	115

CHAPTER V -- SOCIAL INTERACTION: THE CONTEXT 139

A. Daily activities 141

B. The layout: zones of interaction 159

C. The characters 165

CHAPTER VI - TALK AND NARRATIVE: THE CONTENT 209

A. Conversation 210

B. Stories 219

C. News 247

CHAPTER VII - CONCLUSION 275

BIBLIOGRAPHY 284

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

ILLUS. 1. Map of Cape Breton Island.....	56
ILLUS. 2. Ralph E. MacPherson,.....	67
ILLUS. 3. Window inscription.....	71
ILLUS. 4. MacPherson's Store, 1952.....	103
ILLUS. 5. Osgood MacPherson, 1959.....	106
ILLUS. 6. MacPherson's Store, 1976.....	119
ILLUS. 7. Osgood MacPherson.....	122
ILLUS. 8. MacPherson's Store, 1965	138
ILLUS. 9. Sherry MacPherson, 1985.....	144

in MacPherson's store and to examine the role my grandfather played in the storytelling process. I also wanted to examine the purpose of storytelling within the context of the store, from my grandfather's perspective, from the perspective of people who visited the store and, from my own perspective as a folklorist. An obvious purpose for storytelling in the store, as I knew it, was entertainment. As a folklorist, however, I also knew that storytelling can move beyond simple entertainment to a means of communicating local history and genealogies, and as a form of education in traditional values, or as a means of encouraging self-awareness and self-esteem in community members.

As a native of Margaree Valley, I recognized the existence of an active storytelling tradition in the community. While I wanted to study a known storyteller in this community, I was aware that I had to look beyond the individual himself for, as Richard Tallman noted in his study of a Nova Scotia tall tale teller:

The only tradition or traditions against which the storyteller can be evaluated are those which have nurtured him and which he, in turn, has nurtured by his own active or passive participation.¹

Osgood MacPherson was certainly an active bearer of

tradition and his role as a general store merchant nurtured his participation in the storytelling tradition. Thus began my interest in understanding the context, both the traditions and the environment, in which Osgood's storytelling took place.

In 1982, I began my participant-observation fieldwork in MacPherson's General Store, Margaree Valley. Although I had been away at university for five years, I was easily accepted back into the community. After people were suitably satisfied by my explanations that I had returned to work on a paper and spend time with my family, I settled down to do active research. However, as information was gathered and I began preliminary and selective analysis of this information, I began to see that fieldnotes and interviews were directing me more towards a study of the social context of storytelling in Margaree Valley. In fact, my information was far more conducive to a study of the environment in which storytelling took place in Margaree Valley, than it was to one particular narrator, or to the stories being told.

The focus of my work changed while I was in the field, in part because of my preliminary analysis of information

gathered. More significantly, the reason for the change from a biographical-contextual study to a study of communication and socializing patterns, was the death of my grandfather, and prime source of information, Osgood MacPherson. In the process of recovering from this devastating event, I had to re-evaluate both my reasons for choosing this study, and the information I had already gathered. While I know that the shift in emphasis occurred primarily because of my grandfather's death, I feel that the shift was necessary and perhaps inevitable. What I discovered during the period of reassessing my thesis, immediately after his death, was that, instead of collecting actual narratives, I had become more interested in understanding why the general store was an environment that encouraged such widespread socializing. My fieldnotes and the whole emphasis of my interviews had not concentrated on a storyteller but on the tradition of storytelling in Margaree Valley and the social environs that encouraged such practices. In other words, I had focussed on the context for storytelling more so than the content of the narratives themselves. Although my goal had been

to describe the teller and the tales as they occurred, I came to feel that, in reality, the context in which stories were told and the patterns of social behaviour associated with such a context were far more significant.

Related to the change in emphasis, from the storyteller to the context in which stories are told, was my increasing awareness that the people of Margaree Valley do not intentionally seek out storytellers, nor are they aware of any performance routine associated with the storytelling that occurs in MacPherson's Store. They go to MacPherson's Store to socialize and storytelling is a natural occurrence in this setting. Similar findings were reported in Tallman's study of Robert Coffil and Bauman's research in the La Have Islands of Nova Scotia. Both folklorists documented finding little community or personal awareness of performance routines associated with evening storytelling at the general store. In Bauman's experience, La Have Islanders gave greatest respect to older and experienced talkers because they had the greatest number, and most interesting tales, not because of their performing abilities.² Tallman

noted a similar situation in Blomidon, Nova Scotia.

He found that Robert Coffil did not "seek to be the centre of attention as a storyteller," in fact, "other men at the general store...might well characterize him as more of a storyteller than he would himself."³ Tallman suggests that although Coffil was a competent and imaginative storyteller, he did not seek "center stage as a storyteller because storytelling was not that important to him."⁴ The socializing associated with the storytelling was the significant factor for Robert Coffil.

In summary, this study concentrates on a particular store: its history, the history of the merchants, and a very thorough description of the physical environment. Through analysis of this material I have found many similarities to other written works on general stores. For example: the flexibility and versatility evident in the storekeeper's personality, the use of the store as a place to socialize, the 'Characters' that are drawn to this type of environment, and the impact that the merchant's personality has on the dynamics of the social interaction that takes place in the store. My research supports work done by previous folklorists who have looked at the

7
tradition of general stores still existing in small communities, and the talk sessions, narrative patterns, and social interaction that continue to occur in this environment. However, subtle differences do show up in MacPherson's General Store in Margaree Valley, Cape Breton Island, and these are evident throughout this thesis.

The remainder of this thesis takes the following format: Chapter II is a summary of the literature consulted and reviewed. This is followed in Chapter III with a description of the approach and method used to gather information. Chapter IV provides historical detail on the MacPherson family and MacPherson's General Store and presents essential detail necessary for understanding the context of social interaction within this general store. Chapter V presents and describes daily routines in MacPherson's Store and the 'characters' that are involved in information exchange and social interaction within the store. The discussion in Chapter VI focusses on storytelling as it exists today in Margaree Valley although a few historical

references are also included. The final chapter, Chapter VII, presents the conclusions drawn from this study and my interpretations of the observations.

NOTES: CHAPTER I

¹ Richard Sensor Tallman, "The Tall Tale Tradition and the Teller: A Biographical-Contextual Study of a Storyteller, Robert Coffil of Blomidon, Nova Scotia," Diss. Memorial University of Newfoundland 1974, p. 37.

² Richard Bauman, "The La Have Island General Store: Sociability and Verbal Art in a Nova Scotia Community," Journal of American Folklore, 85 (1972), 340.

³ Tallman, p. 41.

⁴ Tallman, p. 5.

CHAPTER II - THE GENERAL STORE IN LITERATURE,
ETHNOGRAPHY, AND FOLKLORE

This is a study of talk, narrative and socializing patterns in Margaree Valley, a small rural community in Cape Breton Island. The context in which this study takes place is a general store, and the individual on which this work initially pivoted was the merchant, Osgood MacPherson. This man was my paternal grandfather. I knew from experience his penchant for storytelling, the pleasure he received from telling stories when he had a captive audience, and the socializing patterns that revolved around these talk sessions in his general store.

There have been within my memory, that is to say within the last twenty-seven years, four general stores in the area known as Margaree Valley. When I began my research in 1982, two of these stores were no longer in existence although either the proprietors

or other family members remained in the Valley. The other two stores were still in operation--one closed shortly after I began my fieldwork and the second is the focus of this paper.

I began the project with the intention of studying the importance of talk in a rural society, how storytelling is used as a communication process in Margaree Valley, and in what context this talk and narrative occur. In order to do this I needed to look at the most popular socializing environment in Margaree Valley--the general store. As a necessary preliminary to a study of this nature, I conducted a review of the literature on general or country stores.

Early in my reading I became aware that references to general stores and old-time merchants in general literature are very often clouded with nostalgia. The merchant is presented as a white-haired, rosy cheeked, cheerful old man, and the store as a small building complete with pot-belly stove, front veranda and rocking chairs. Realistically I knew this was not the case--not every general store merchant was cut from that pre-determined mold, and most certainly every general

Store did not fit that physical description.

Interestingly, these nostalgic views were presented by authors often not closely associated with the merchant or his store.¹ Much more realistic pictures were painted by merchants themselves.

Although most of the materials written on general stores include quotations from and about the merchants themselves, it is difficult to find personal experience accounts by individual merchants. One very brief report entitled "The Way Things Were: The Story of a 'Country Store'", can be found in the journal Foxfire.² This account is taken from an interview with T.M. Rickman, the proprietor of a general store near Franklin, North Carolina. Rickman provides a history of his store, a discussion of the changes in the merchandise carried in the store, credit practices, and some general theories on why general stores have ceased to be important in rural communities (e.g., people acquired automobiles and could travel greater distances to buy food).

A study that develops similar ideas to those set out in the Foxfire article but gives a more complete picture of what it was like to be the proprietor of a

general store in the early part of the twentieth century is R.E. Gould's Yankee Storekeeper.³ The book is full of stories and anecdotes about business in general, trading practices, credit ventures and rural characters. Gould successfully avoids the common tone of sentimentality that often pervades personal reminiscences and concentrates instead on demonstrating the importance of the merchant in a small community.⁴

Other practices discussed by Rickman in the Foxfire article--specifically credit, trade and social functions--are also discussed by Gould. Although Rickman's reflections were recorded thirty years after Gould's, it is interesting to notice the many similarities in the articles. Common to both proprietors is the survival instinct. Both decide to sell part of their stock and maintain a smaller store as business begins to slow down. The ability to 'switch gears,' and change roles and services as community demands evolve is a common characteristic of successful general store merchants.

Samuel H. Terry, an early nineteenth century merchant, wrote How to Keep a Store: Embodying The

Conclusions of Thirty Years Experience in Merchandizing.⁵

Terry provides practical instructions for storekeeping based on his experience in a Pennsylvania store. He covers everything from purchasing goods to the social lives of employees. Terry does not waste time being nostalgic, concentrating instead on the practical details of business management. Although the book reveals the insider's perspective, or what a merchant at that time perceived as crucial management problems, the excruciatingly fine detail in which the information is presented quickly becomes tedious.

Often, the books written on general stores focus only on the commercial side of the business and neglect discussing the social aspect of storekeeping. A decidedly different perspective on the life of a merchant in nineteenth century America is told by Phineas T. Barnum in his book, Barnum's Own Story.⁶ This book is full of anecdotal accounts of the tricks and practical jokes played by both the customers and the merchants. Barnum delights in telling of the social gatherings in the general store by the "jolly, story-telling, joke-playing, wags and wits, regular

originals" who got together in the afternoons and evenings to exchange stories. Barnum laughs at himself and his customers. His description of the ways in which a general store contributes to the social life of a community is a refreshing change from books that concentrate only on the commercial aspects of running a business. No other accounts of social interaction in general stores are quite as descriptive as Barnum's work, but, pulling pranks and telling funny stories is common in general store social gatherings. The performer who is able to captivate an audience not only with a story but also in laughter is well respected in such a social environment.

I have found no ethnographic studies completely devoted to general stores. There are, however, five published accounts that fit the basic ethnographic framework. Three books that present broad overviews of the roles of the merchant and his general store in rural communities are: Possum Trot: Rural Community South, Charles Schreiner, General Merchandise, and Jedidiah Barker, 1787-1876: A Footnote to the History of the Military Tract of Central New York. Richard Bauman's, "The Li Have Island General Store:

Socialibility and Verbal Art in a Nova Scotia Community," and W. Wayne Fanning's, "Storytelling at a Nova Scotia General Store," are contemporary studies of one type of interaction found in rural Nova Scotia general stores--the talk session.

Herman Nixon's Possum Trot: Rural Community South is a biography of a rural community in Alabama. One chapter is devoted to the general store owned by Nixon's father. The senior Nixon was a true entrepreneur; in addition to his role as storekeeper, Bill Nixon was the railroad ticket agent, freight agent, express agent, postmaster, undertaker and blacksmith. Although Nixon lists the various types of merchandise that the store carried over the years and indicates the multiple roles of the merchant, he is more concerned with presenting the economic situation of the South than he is with a discussion of the function of the general store in a rural community. In fact, it is his discussion of the other businesses that his father operated which is the most informative aspect of Nixon's work. Once again, we are reminded of the flexible nature and willingness to change in response to community needs evident in the personality

of the successful general store merchant.

Captain Charles Schreiner opened his general store in Kerrville, Texas on Christmas Eve, 1869. In 1944, J. Evetts Haley told the story behind Schreiner's general store in his book Charles Schreiner, General Merchandise: The Story of a Country Store.⁹ Haley describes the exterior of the store in detail,¹⁰ depicting a store typical of the time: white-washed walls, a picket fence, double front doors and few windows. The interior was also typical of the times. A long counter ran down one side of the store facing the stove, and there were two windows on the opposite wall. The shelves were piled skyward with groceries, patent medicines, dry goods and clothing.

Although Haley allows nostalgia and sentimentality to colour his description of the Schreiner General Store, his book is significant in that he traces the history of an early general store from its beginning and provides the reader with a complete picture of the social and economic conditions of the period between 1869 and 1944 in rural Texas. When describing the functional aspects of the general store in an isolated community, Haley notes that it.

was used for "credit and comfort, whiskey and beans, conversation and conviviality, and all the other amenities of a very vital and not altogether uncivilized life."¹⁰ He also explains that the merchant served the community in a variety of ways; as the banker, a druggist and always as a friend. Here again is the theme of the storekeeper as a multifaceted individual, serving the community in many ways.

Jedidiah Barber, 1787-1876: A Footnote to the History of the Military Tract of Central New York, by Herbert Barber Howe,¹¹ is another example of the variety of ways in which the merchant served his community. The setting for this book is Homer, New York between 1810 and 1829. Barber was a versatile man, in the tradition of a general store merchant. He was often called upon to represent the community in matters requiring an educated man. Barber had out-of-town contacts so that he was able to aid any community member who needed to deal outside the community. He offered legal advice, held money for individuals and gave medical and political advice. Not only did Barber serve the community at large but his store was

the centre of many activities in the community. Howe tells the reader that the store was the "source of supply for all the wants of the people".¹² This seems like an enormous role to fill but it was the usual role of the early general store in rural settings.¹³

Bauman's study of the general store stemmed from his attempt to describe the aesthetic of speaking in the La Have Islands of Nova Scotia.¹⁴ He sought to isolate the one social setting that seemed to perpetuate "talking" in this environment and was directed by the community members to the general store. While Bauman provides information on the history of the community, and the history of the stores on the La Have Islands, he focuses on one particular social situation found in one general store, the evening "talk" session.

Bauman's research indicated clearly that even though the general store talk sessions were singled out as important socializing events, the La Have Islanders were not particularly attentive to patterns of speech, or performance skills displayed by the active participants in the talk session. Bauman

concludes that:

What is apparently going on in the culture of the La Hava Islanders is that within the whole range of speech situations making up the speech economy of the islanders, the session at the store is singled out as special, isolated from the others and enjoyed for its own sake, because talking there may be enjoyed for its own sake and not as part of another activity or for some instrumental purpose. In other words, the fact that this situation is set aside for sociability, pure and simple, makes it special.¹⁵

Bauman has provided a very thorough examination of talk in the general store. Even though the study focuses so closely on one aspect of interaction, the talk session, we must not conclude that sociability in the general store is limited to this one event. It must be noted that the general store was also used as a meeting place, a forum for public addresses and a loafing spot.

Following the model of the Bauman paper, W. Wayne Fanning also looked at the storytelling sessions heard at a general store in Sunnybrae, Nova Scotia.¹⁶ Fanning conducted interviews with known storytellers outside the actual general store setting. As a native of Sunnybrae, Fanning did not have the problem of introducing himself to the community and he was

received positively by the community. He chose to interview people he knew were active storytellers at the local stores and with whom he was comfortable. Since Fanning was an active member of the group which frequented the general store, he was able to direct his interviews and collect stories that he found memorable. As with Bauman, the focus of the paper is storytelling. Unlike Bauman, Fanning does not re-create the talk sessions at Sunnybrae general store. Although he chooses to interview his informants outside of the store environment, in order to make the interviewing situation more comfortable, he does stress that the socializing and storytelling sessions continue to happen in the Sunnybrae store. Fanning recognizes that oral narrative performances may not continue in the form that he studied, or that he remembers, but they will continue because they are viewed by the inhabitants of Sunnybrae as important forms of community interaction.

Although most published accounts of general stores within particular regions are essentially collections of memorabilia and personal experience narratives, some present more analytical and detailed

accounts of the various roles general stores play in rural settings. Two such accounts of New England general stores, The Old Country Store by Gerald Carson,¹⁷ and The General Store in Vermont: An Oral History, by Jane Beck,¹⁸ were particularly informative for this study.

Both Carson and Beck noted one very important way in which the local store served the community--the type and amount of hospitality offered. The same building that housed the general store was often also the post office, barber shop and community bank. In The Old Country Store, Carson notes that "the store was what made a neighborhood"¹⁹ and it is easy to see why; everything that an individual might need could be found under the roof of the general store. Since most of the village happenings were directly related to 'the store,' it became the place where community members gathered to meet friends and hear the news. During the day, the store was a regular business but it became the "community hall" in the evenings. In some localities only men gathered at the store in the evenings to exchange stories and discuss matters of importance. In others, the younger

people joined the men. Seldom, if ever, did women socialize in this manner; this was male territory.²⁰ It is interesting to note that this practice was also found in a rural Newfoundland community.

James Faris portrays the general store in Cat Harbour, Newfoundland as the social centre for the men in the community.²¹ He explains that there are three stores in Cat Harbour; two residential shops at either end of the community, and Scarlet's shop. Scarlet's is the:

"residentially-neutral" shop where information coming into the community is usually received. Scarlet's is the single large mercantile concern in Cat Harbour, and the shop where outsiders come first. This is the disseminating point for most 'news' entering the outport, which is then, in turn, carried to one or the other of the residential shops for further discussion and dissection.²²

The men of Cat Harbour attempt to get to Scarlet's Shop at least once a day. The women seldom go to the shop, and if they do have to visit the shop, they do not speak while there. They do listen carefully, though, as they would like to leave with some small items of news that they can talk about for the rest of the day.

A valuable comprehensive study on country stores in the southern United States is found in a doctoral dissertation by Jacqueline Page Bull.²³ The study's objective is "to look at the place and the role that general stores had in the social and economic picture of the South, following the Civil War."²⁴ Details are given concerning the appearance of general stores, the duties of the merchant in the community, and the use of the store as a post office, meeting place and centre for disseminating news. Bull also portrays the southern merchants as entrepreneurs with many and varied business interests.²⁵

In Clement Harris' study of an English village, Hennage: A Social System in Miniature,²⁶ and in Robert Paine's study of the small Norwegian community of Nordbotn,²⁷ the emphasis is on the shopkeeper's social function. In Hennage, the merchant is seen as the mediator between the villagers and the outside world.²⁸ This mediating role can be seen in the example of mail delivery. The post office is located in the store and Harris mentions that the people like this idea because they can ask the advice of the presiding mediator, the merchant, when they receive

official mail such as pensions, benefits and insurance stamps. In Paine's work, the Nordbotn merchant 'mediated' a bit too much and found himself in trouble as a result. People wanted to confide in the storekeeper but he was expected to store this knowledge. In fact, he was expected to 'bank' the knowledge of it, either indefinitely or until an occasion arose in which it would be socially inoffensive, and also relevant, to allow it to flow again.²⁹

I have discussed the pervasive themes that were uncovered in the literature on general stores, and which seemed most applicable to the fieldwork I was to undertake. I knew from previous experience that general store merchants had to be both innovative and versatile in their business practices, in order to remain successful; I did not however realize how often the theme of flexibility would appear in the literature and to what lengths it would be discussed. It was also comforting to discover that family members often wrote about family stores, and, contrary to my fears that such studies would be written so subjectively as to be useless for research purposes, I

found such works far less nostalgic and far more factual and concrete than were other more general reports on this topic.

As we have seen throughout this survey of general store literature, the merchant and his business establishment were very important in rural societies. Not only was the store a place to purchase supplies, but it was a convenient location for meeting people, a forum for airing ideas, and a means of sharing and disseminating information. My own experience in my grandfather's store indicated that general stores were still filling, to some degree, all of the above functions in a rural community in Cape Breton Island. While I was aware that MacPherson's General Store functioned as a place to socialize, I was surprised to learn how common this was elsewhere. In every book or article I read, and in each interview that I conducted, people talked about socializing in the general store. The general store was the context in which community storytellers/talkers gathered and displayed their talents. As a folklorist, studying a narrative tradition, or the context/environment in which these narratives were told, it was extremely

important to develop an understanding of the most common socializing environment in Margaree Valley--the general store. To aid in my understanding of the social and verbal interaction occurring in this environment, I turned to works on the contextual analysis of performance events.

The importance of context in folklore research was noted as early as 1925 by Malinowski. While studying the folktales of the Trobriand Islanders he noted that:

The text, of course, is extremely important, but without the context it remains lifeless....The performance, again, has to be placed in its proper time setting--the hour of the day, and the season, with the background of the sprouting gardens awaiting future work.... All these elements are equally relevant; all must be studied as well as the text. The stories live in native life and not on paper, and when a scholar jots them down without being able to evoke the atmosphere in which they flourish he has given us but a mutilated bit of reality.³⁰

The shift from studying text to context has had great impact on the discipline of folklore. Folklore is no longer considered to be only literary (text), but can be viewed as "human verbal symbolic interaction of a performing kind."³¹ This is not to

say that textual analysis is unimportant; however, the attention now given to the speaker and the listener has reoriented the concept of folklore toward communication. Thus, we can now consider "those utterances which transform the roles of speaker and listener to those of performer and audience."³² Telling personal experience narratives is part of everyday speech. However, presenting a polished account of a personal experience to achieve an expected reaction, or to make a specific point, requires the skill and techniques of an experienced narrator or performer. Integral to a performance of this kind is knowledge of the audience--small group presentation practically guarantees that the narrator will have an intimate knowledge of his audience. As John A. Robinson noted in a study of personal narratives:

A proper account of everyday storytelling must take into consideration what story is being told, to whom, when, and for what purposes. Furthermore, the contributions of the audience must be given equal consideration to those of the speaker or narrator.³³

The audience affects the performance and the manner in which a narrative is presented. A narrator will react

to the members of the audience, new or different listeners, and the response of the audience to his narrative(s). This theory of small-group presentation is expounded by Dan Ben-Amos in his book Folklore in Context. He found that small group involvement encourages the communicative process. He defines 'small group' as:

...a number of persons who communicate with one another, often over a span of time, and who are few enough so that each person is able to communicate with all others, not second-hand through other people, but face-to-face....For the folkloric act to happen, two social conditions are necessary: both the performers and the audience have to be in the same situation and be part of the same [sic] reference group.³⁴

My personal experience with narrators in the general store context supported this viewpoint on small-group presentation. I knew that in Margaree Valley the types of listeners present in the store--male or female, young or old--affected the form and manner of presentation by the storytellers. In fact, as Ben-Amos and Goldstein noted, the situation in which a narrator found himself would determine his mood, type of story told, content of his story and, as

a result of these factors, the response of his audience.³⁵

Similar findings were reported in the work that Richard Bauman carried out on the La Have Islands in Nova Scotia. Bauman attempted to single out and concentrate on which, if any, of the community social settings encouraged and perpetuated verbal art. Through interviews he was able to reconstruct the once common 'talk' sessions at the La Have Island general store. In La Have the small group privileged to attend evening talk sessions at the general store were the men of the community. Women might come to the store to shop, but they did not participate in the talk. Children were also excluded; however, once the males were in their early teens they were permitted to listen on the edge of the group.³⁶ In his attempt to understand this storytelling tradition, Bauman worked to reconstruct the type of environment, or context, in which the tradition developed and flourished.

In Richard Tallman's study of a Nova Scotia tall tale teller, Robert Coffil, the context in which Coffil displays his talent--the general store--is also

discussed:

Don Forsythe's store in Delhaven, the place where Bob Coffil spends some afternoons and evenings, serves as a meeting place for old and young alike, and its inventory is about what one would expect of a typical country store....³⁷

In the evenings.... Four or five men sit on the crude wooden bench that Forsythe made when he built the store over forty years ago; two men sit on a desk...one or two others sit atop the soft drink cooler, as well as on the counter; either Forsythe or his son-in-law, Bill Kay, stands behind the counter; other men, if there are others present, either lean against the counter near the wood stove in the rear center of the store or stand toward the front by the door.³⁸

The conversation is as variable as the weather and the crops. Forsythe's general store does not present a performance-conscious context for the telling of stories, but stories are told nevertheless.³⁹

Compared to other places where stories are told, Forsythe's store is about like most. The difference, to Coffil, is one of background.⁴⁰

Forsythe's store...exists and flourished as a place of sociability today because of local attitudes toward change, attitudes that have been tempered by the fact that the area was never extremely isolated like...the La Have Islands off the South Shore of Nova Scotia.⁴¹

The store where Bob Coffil can talk is of interest, then, because it coexists with much of the modern world, while in some other places similar stores are only a memory.⁴²

Tallman places Coffil's tale telling in context by describing in detail the physical environment, the listeners and other participants in the talk session. Again, we are shown that understanding the context aids in appreciation and understanding the text.⁴³

Common throughout the literature were references to qualities inherent in a successful general store merchant and the functions that a general store served in a small community. Merchants were portrayed as innovative and versatile--entrepreneurs striving to survive in rural society. Both the merchant and his store adapted to meet community needs. For example, in addition to offering his store as a place for social interaction, and a disseminating point for news and gossip, the merchant often served his community as postmaster, banker, druggist, barber, and offered medical and legal advice. The most common function that the store served in the community was as a place to socialize. Integral to the socializing was the amount of hospitality offered by the merchant. This hospitality was acknowledged by all community members, but accepted primarily by men.

In addition to looking for these characteristics in merchants in Margaree Valley, and for similar patterns of social interaction, the theoretical studies on contextual analysis and performance events suggested other areas for examination. These areas were: small group dynamics, performance skills, roles of performers and audience, and patterns of both verbal and non-verbal interaction. With these principles in mind, I embarked upon the participant-observation fieldwork described in the following chapter.

NOTES: CHAPTER II

¹ Other nostalgic descriptions of general stores can be found in Phyllis Fenner, "Grandfather's Country Store," American Mercury, 61(December 1945), 672-677; Margaret Dana, "Elegy of the Country Storekeeper," Atlantic Monthly, 158(1939), 285-294; Brenda Marshall and Len Moore, Grandma's General Store (Adelaide, Australia: Rigby Limited, 1978) ; Charlotte Curtis, "My Grandfather's General Store," Yankee, New Hampshire, (May 1979), 40-42; Jessie Wood, "Commerce, Customers, Customs," Green Mountain Whittlin's, 25(1973), 16-27.

² Joe Vinson, "The Way Things Were: The Story of a Country Store," Foxfire, 14:3(1980), 266-272.

³ R.E. Gould, Yankee Storekeeper. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1946).

⁴ One year after writing Yankee Storekeeper,

Gould wrote Yankee Drummer (1947): In this book, he concentrates on the years he spent as a travelling salesman (or drummer) and reveals the relationship between a salesman and a storekeeper.

⁵ Samuel M. Terry, How to Keep a Store:

Embodying The Conclusions of Thirty Years Experience in Merchandising (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1884).

⁶ Phineas T. Barnum, Barnum's Own Story,

Comp. Walda R. Brown. (New York: Dover Publications, 1961).

⁷ Barnum, p. 13.

⁸ Herman Nixon, Possum Trot: Rural Community South (Norman: University of Okalahoma Press, 1941).

⁹ J. Evetts Halley, Charles Schreiner, General Merchandise: The Story of a Country Store (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1944).

¹⁰ Halley, p.

¹¹ Herbert Barber Howe, Jedidiah Barber 1787-1876: A Footnote to the Military Tract of Central New York (New York: AMS Press, 1966).

¹² Howe, p. 55.

¹³ The need for flexibility and versatility in a successful merchant, and the number of services

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Barton, Berry and Lincoln Frontier Merchants (New York: Stratford House, 1947); Catherine A. Wiggins, "The Store," New England Galaxy, 13:1(1971), 53-57; Jessie Washburn Wood, "Commerce, Customers, Customs," Green Mountain Whittlin's, 25(1973), 16-27.

14 Richard Bauman, "The La Have Island General Store: Sociability and Verbal Art in a Nova Scotia Community," Journal of American Folklore, 85(1972), 330-343.

15 Bauman, p. 340-341.

16 W. Wayne Fanning, "Storytelling at a Nova Scotia General Store," Culture & Tradition, 3(1978), 57-67.

17 Gerald Carson, The Old Country Store (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954).

18 Jane Beck, The General Store in Vermont: An Oral History (Montpelier, Vermont: Vermont Historical Society, 1980).

19 Carson, p. ix.

²⁰ Other works that mention the general store talk sessions as predominantly male activity are: Richard Sensor Tallman, "The Tall Tale Tradition and the Teller: A Biographical-Contextual Study of a Storyteller, Robert Coffil of Blomidon, Nova Scotia," Diss. Memorial University of Newfoundland 1974; and, W. Wayne Fanning, "Storytelling at a Nova Scotia General Store," Culture & Tradition 3(1978), 57-67.

²¹ James Faris, "The Dynamics of Verbal Exchange: A Newfoundland Example," Anthropologica, 8 No.2(1966), 235-248.

²² Faris, p. 236.

²³ Jacqueline Page Bull, "The General Store in the Southern Agrarian Economy From 1865-1910," Diss. Graduate School, University of Kentucky 1948.

²⁴ Bull, p. 1.

²⁵ Other studies on southern general stores are: Thomas D. Clark, Pills, Petticoats and Plows: The Southern Country Store (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), and two articles by Clark, "The Country Store in Post-Civil War Tennessee," Publication of the East Tennessee Historical Society, 17(1945), 3-21; and "The Country Store in American

Social History," Ohio History, 60, No 2 (April 1951), 126-144.

²⁶ Clement Harris, Hennage: A Social System in Miniature (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974).

²⁷ Robert Paine, "Information Communication and Information Management," Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, 7(1970), 172-188.

²⁸ See also description of Jedidiah Barber as mediator in Herbert Barber Howe, Jedidiah Barber 1787-1876: A Footnote to the History of the Military Tract of Central New York (New York AMS Press, 1966).

²⁹ Paine, p. 187.

³⁰ Bronislaw Malinowski, "Myth in Primitive Psychology," (1926; rpt. in Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays, Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1948), p. 104.

³¹ Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth S. Goldstein, eds. Folklore: Performance and Communication. The Hague: Mouton, 1975, p. 3.

³² Ben-Amos and Goldstein, p. 4.

³³ John A. Robinson, "Personal Narratives Reconsidered," Journal of American Folklore,

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³⁴ Ben-Amos, Folklore in Context, p. 13.

³⁵ Ben-Amos and Goldstein, p. 4.

³⁶ Richard Bauman, "The La Have Island General Store: Sociability and Verbal Art in a Nova Scotia Community," Journal of American Folklore, 85(1971), p. 333.

³⁷ Tallman, p. 461.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 462.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 465.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 473.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 474.

⁴² Ibid., p. 474.

⁴³ Other works that were significant in developing my sense of awareness of the importance of contextual analyses for a study of this nature were: Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "A Parable in Context: A Social Interactional Analysis of Storytelling Performance," in Folklore: Performance and Communication, eds. Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth Goldstein. (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), 105-130; Roger D. Abrahams and Richard Bauman, "Sense and Nonsense in St. Vincent: Speech Behavior and Decorum in a

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22:1(April 1985), 45-69; and, William R. Bascom, "Four
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CHAPTER III - FIELDWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Research for this project began in January, 1982 when I returned to my home in Margaree Valley, Cape Breton Island to begin four months of participant-observation fieldwork in my grandfather's store. My paternal grandfather, Osgood MacPherson, had been a merchant in the Margaree Valley for almost forty years. When I began my fieldwork in 1982, he was not able to be physically active in the management of his store, having retired due to health problems. However, he still visited daily to 'check up on things' and talk with his friends. He was, for many people, the reason to both shop and visit at the MacPherson's store. He sat on his stool behind the counter and 'held court,' as it were, with the customers and friends who dropped in.

Initially, I was concerned about using my family and their business as the focus of such an intensive project. My concerns ranged from the fear of

exposing in some way the personal lives of my family, to a concern with how seriously they would treat my undertaking and how cooperative members of the community would be. I was reassured by previous folklore studies in which relatives wrote extensively on the family store.¹ Bauman's work in the La Have Islands² indicated that community cooperation in a project examining a local tradition is obtainable and Fanning's work in Sunnybrae, Nova Scotia³ proved that a community member can have a high degree of success in examining the storytelling tradition in his or her own community. My intent, then, when I returned to Margaree Valley, was to develop a history of MacPherson's store, and of the style and context of conversation and socializing in the store, focusing on my grandfather's era as the merchant. I intended to do this through an examination of any historical artifacts and documents available, through observation of daily events in the store and through interviews with community members who were friends of my grandfather, who used the store as a place to socialize, or were known as "talkers" in Margaree Valley.

When I began working in MacPherson's store, it was not difficult to be assimilated into the setting as a member of the staff. This was because of my status as a member of the MacPherson family; thus, I was a familiar figure in the store and the community. Although I had spent many hours in the store as a young person, filling in when necessary to serve at the cash or carry boxes out to cars, I still had a great deal to learn. The first week spent in the store was one of familiarizing myself with the duties of a store clerk: learning how to use the new electric cash register; observing the daily routines of the other shop employees; learning about staff politics; and learning how to answer questions without disclosing too much information, personal or otherwise, yet be considered a good talker. The easiest tactic was to begin questioning before anyone had the opportunity to question me. Safe topics for discussion were the weather, current events, births, and deaths. Using this first week as one of observation was helpful in enabling me to fit into the business setting. In an effort to keep busy and be as inconspicuous as possible, I was content to stock shelves while

watching and listening to everything around me.

The permanent time staff at MacPherson's store consists of four people: one female cashier, two male clerks, and one member of the MacPherson family.

Sherry MacPherson, the cashier, is Osgood's daughter.

Robert Hart and Harold MacDougall, the male clerks, are both community members not related to the

MacPherson family. These three people are in their late thirties and all have worked for MacPherson's store for fifteen years or more. As the newest member of the work force, I was given the most mundane jobs --sweeping the floor and dusting shelves. Eager to be part of the team, I was more than willing to carry out any task. I soon became proficient at restocking shelves, filling 'called-in' orders, and packing boxes. I was not as adept at filling gas tanks or lifting heavy cartons, but that came in time.

Every evening when I left the store, I wrote about the day's events in detail. These accounts span a time period of four months, January to April, 1982. Often, after writing my daily field notes, I had questions concerning things that had happened in the store. With questions in hand, I sought someone to

answer them. Thus began countless kitchen conversations with my grandfather and any other member of the family or of the community who walked through the door. Several of these sessions were tape recorded.

Often it was difficult to maintain my grandfather's interest in this project. It seemed that if he could not have an active role in the business he loved, he did not wish to remember the way ~~it~~ used to be. When I was able to engage him in conversation about his business, it was often about 'the early days' when his father ran the same store, not about his personal experiences. Fortunately, I have field notes from 1978, a time period when he was more articulate about his role as a merchant. At this time, I was collecting information on the history of, and the storytelling tradition in, Margaree Valley for another project. Because of Osgood's untimely death in March 1982 these earlier notes became a valuable resource for this thesis.

As a result of my grandfather's death, I lost interest in this project for some time. Although I had a great deal of information on tape and on paper, it

was only with encouragement from my family that I overcame my reluctance to continue my research. I realized that although my grandfather was no longer present, MacPherson's store would remain, and would continue to serve the community in much the same way it had when he managed it. Fortunately I have been able to recall many things about the way that my grandfather ran the store. The details that I could not remember were provided by my parents, the clerks, and several of the more regular customers. Fieldwork notes collected after April 1982 have been entered in subsequent journals covering the time period of May 1982 to June 1985.

A valuable source of information that enabled me to reconstruct the time periods pertaining to both my grandfather and great-grandfather was the second floor of the store itself, where many artifacts were stored. Such relics included glass showcases, boxes of men's button-on collars as fresh and as clean as ever in their cellophane wrappers inside dusty cardboard boxes, notepaper which read "Osgood's Service Station," a legal document drawn up between Osgood and the Co-Operative Stores Ltd., an old advertising

display for EverReady Batteries, and one for Wrigley's Chewing Gum, a screen door handle stating "Red Rose Tea is Good Tea," measuring scales of various sizes, wooden and metal spigots for barrels and kegs, merchandise catalogues, blank death certificates, wooden bicycle wheels, tools and horse shoes, casket furnishings, one and two-quart tin measures, glass jars, glass battery cases used for a home generator, 78 rpm records, and a sign made to hang at the front of the store which states, "Ralph MacPherson, General Merchant." Most importantly, hidden in the back corner of the rafters, were ledgers from the early years of MacPherson's store. These ledgers dated from 1879 to 1910 and gave a daily account of all business transactions. The function of many of these artifacts was explained by my father, Ralph R. MacPherson. I was then able to use this knowledge to direct interviews with older community members.

Seventeen people were interviewed during the period of my fieldwork in Margaree Valley, many of them family members. Seven of the interviews were conducted using a tape recorder and the other ten were recorded on paper. Many of the informants were

familiar with tape recorders and most even had tape recorders in their homes. Despite this familiarity, the majority of the informants preferred that I not record our conversations. I was not able to determine the exact reasons for this hesitation as each informant gave a different excuse. These excuses suggested that my informants were not comfortable with the idea that other people might hear the tape at a future date. Margaree people are very careful about the manner in which they give out information. If I had asked questions and recorded their answers, then I would have proof that they actually gave me certain information. However, if I was merely taking notes on our conversations, then they could deny anything they felt I had misconstrued. I did not insist on using the tape recorder, but took extensive notes during untaped interviews. Often the informants would want to think about the questions I had asked and this enabled me to catch up on my notetaking.

According to my degree of familiarity with the informant, I would either write out specific questions or simply list topics I wished to cover in the interviews. Most of the informants were very uneasy at

the beginning of the interview, but as soon as they realized that the questions were about my family and not theirs, they would relax and talk more freely. The general format that I used to conduct my interviews was :

- A. Introduce the topic of MacPherson's general store.
- B. Ask direct questions:

Why did you go to the store?... if 'to buy groceries' was the response, ask, Did you go for any other reason? In what way does this store serve the community?

What time of the day, or the week, do you go to the store?

Is there a time of day when either men or women visit the store?

As a young person did you 'hang-around' the store?

Did this environment encourage storytelling?

Can you remember any stories that were told?

Do people still gather at the store?... if
yes, why? If no, why not?

Are stories still told?...if yes, give an
example.

Do you remember Ralph E. or Osgood?

C. Ask interpretive questions:

How has the store changed over the years?

Why have these changes occurred?

Does the store continue to serve the
community? (especially in ways other than
selling essentials)

Is there a difference between 'talking' and
'telling stories'?

What is this difference?

D. Close by saying that if any answers change
after thinking about the questions, please
contact me.

My understanding of the community and the people
enabled me to relax the informant by asking questions
in a manner that did not insult or offend, to
encourage further conversation with favourable

responses, and to tailor each interview to the personality of the individual informant.

One unavoidable problem when relying on human memory is that one must deal with biased and incomplete information. In order to compile much of the information concerning the early history of MacPherson's store in Margaree Valley it was necessary for me to talk to the oldest living members of the community. It must be recognized that not many people alive today remember Ralph E., the first MacPherson merchant, and their memories have been coloured by time. The majority of my informants, however, were middle-aged persons with more accurate, if selective, memories. People withheld information they thought was too personal, too embarrassing, or just not important. By obtaining more than one version of any given story, I was able to uncover previously withheld information. Dates in this thesis are not always exact, again because of human memory. Time references are made in very loose terms by many of my informants such as, "back when a dollar was a lot of money," "back to when I can just remember," "back when gas cost \$0.28 a gallon," or "when I was pregnant with...." It must be

noted that when exact dates are unknown approximate ones are given. In most cases my understanding of the community and its members has enabled me to separate fact from fiction. In itself this introduces an additional bias, that of my own interpretation.

Most of the information presented in this study has not been previously recorded. Prior to this thesis, such information existed in two forms: verbal, for those willing to listen, and in the memories of those elderly people still living between 1980 and 1984. This collection of information is significant in that it is original research, the first of its kind in this geographical region.⁴ It will be pertinent to anyone interested in the history of general stores, the function of general stores in a rural environment, or the socializing patterns that evolve within this setting. Special emphasis is placed on the art of story-telling or narrating in Margaree Valley, Cape Breton Island. This is an art still practiced by a group of people who love to socialize and do so at MacPherson's general store.

To ensure the privacy of those who were willing to be interviewed for this thesis, I have changed the

names of all informants and characters described herein. The names of the MacPherson family, the clerks in the store, and other Valley merchants have not been altered. Throughout this study, I have used the terms Margaree Valley, Margaree, and the Valley interchangeably. Technically speaking, Margaree Valley includes the entire river valley, a distance of some forty miles. However, to the local people, Margaree Valley consists of one small area between Margaree Centre and Margaree Forks. Margaree Valley is approximately six miles long, and in the middle of this area is MacPherson's general store.

The use of brackets and ellipses in direct quotations in this work indicates author intervention. Information found in brackets is presented to help the reader clarify characters or information not fully explained in the quotation. Pauses in speech are indicated by the use of ellipses. A map of Cape Breton Island has been provided to aid the reader in locating Margaree Valley and other communities mentioned herein.

NOTES: CHAPTER III

¹ Herman Nixon, Possum Trot: Rural Community South (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941), and Herbert Barber Howe, Jedidiah Barber 1787-1876: A Footnote to the Military Tract of Central New York (New York: AMS Press, 1966).

² Richard Bauman, "The La Have Island General Store: Sociability and Verbal Art in a Nova Scotia Community," Journal of American Folklore, 85(1972), 330-343.

³ W. Wayne Fanning, "Storytelling at a Nova Scotia General Store," Culture and Tradition, 3(1978), 57-67.

⁴ Although a few brief studies of life in Margaree Valley have been conducted by Ronald Caplan, editor of The Cape Breton Magazine, they generally

consist of brief articles based on interviews with elderly residents. Consequently, they are restricted in terms of historical scope and the richness of detail presented.

7

ILLUS. 1. Cape Breton Island



CHAPTER IV - HISTORY

The following chapter provides an overview of the history of the MacPherson family in Margaree Valley, and a detailed history of 'MacPherson's Store.' This information is significant for the reader in that it provides a setting and context for the subsequent study of talk, narrative and social interaction.

The information is presented in four parts. First, a brief description of the history of Margaree Valley and its economic background is given to provide insight into the environment in which MacPherson's general store evolved. The remaining three sections concentrate on the MacPherson family and the store in three separate eras: 1909 to 1942 (the early years); 1942 to 1978 (the middle years); and 1978 to 1985 (the recent years). The distinction between these eras is based on major changes in the structure of the store or business activities of the MacPherson merchant and

by a change in the merchant himself, from Ralph E. MacPherson as the first merchant, to his son Osgood, to Osgood's son Ralph R. MacPherson.

Although this chapter presents some genealogical material on the MacPherson family and discusses the numerous business sidelines of the three merchants, it focuses on the store itself, and, to a varying degree, on the personalities of each of the three men as a merchant. A detailed description of goods stocked in the store is provided for the reader because it was seen as important information by every informant interviewed. Such attention to detail and routines by Margaree people is common and will be a noticeable thread throughout this thesis, whether referring to shopping patterns or story telling.

A. The Community

Margaree Valley is a small community on the northwest side of Cape Breton Island.¹ It is situated twenty miles from the Trans-Canada Highway on the well-known Cabot Trail route around the Island. Margaree is a river valley stretching over

approximately twenty miles of notably scenic landscape. The Margaree river winds and twists through the centre of this land, beginning high in the mountains and eventually opening into the Atlantic Ocean at Margaree Harbour. The mountains, visible from every part of the Valley, provide a sharp contrast to the low-lying river meadows. Houses and farmlands dot the landscape in a random pattern following the irregular outline of the river and the narrow two-lane road that runs throughout the district.

Although no one is sure of the origin of the name Margaree, interesting theories exist in both the oral and the written histories of the area. It has been said that the name Margaree is a derivative of the French name "Marguerite" or that it comes from the name of a community in France called Magre.² Another common story is that Margaree was the name of an Indian maiden who drowned in the river.³ One entertaining account in local history combines two of these themes:

A group of Cheticamp fishermen passing Margaree Harbour were attracted by the loud lamentations of Indian mourners on the shore

who were crying "Marguerite! Marguerite! Marguerite!". Inquiries brought forth the information that a Micmac maiden named Marguerite, despondent over the death of her lover, had drowned herself in the river. The incident, it is said, so impressed the Cheticamp group that they called the river "Marguerite," the name in the course of time being extended to the areas through which the river estuary and its two branches flow.⁴

In whatever manner the name was chosen, the name itself causes some confusion as it applies not only to the entire region surrounding the river but also to specific communities within the valley. At one time, rural communities were named after the first family to move into the area or an important community member. In the Margaree Valley, three such communities were Frizzleton, Cranton Section and Rossville. In later years, these places were all given names beginning or ending with Margaree: Margaree Valley, Margaree Centre and North East Margaree, respectively. The community of Margaree Valley was first known as Middle Section,⁵ probably due to its location halfway between the settlement at the head of the river and those further down. Once local businesses were established, the name was changed to "Frizzleton" after a prominent merchant, James Frizzle. When the

merchant and his family left Cape Breton, a group of concerned community members applied to have the name changed to Margaree Valley. The name became official in 1961.⁶ Today, the community of Margaree Valley is designated as a postal district and includes the former village of Frizzleton and the regions of Portree and Egypt Road. The current population of Margaree Valley is approximately 370 and the area measures roughly 10 square miles.

The first settlers in the Margaree region were four brothers from the Ross family. According to tradition, when the brothers arrived in 1800 the only other inhabitants of the Valley were the native Indians. The Rosses were looking for land grants large enough to allow them to settle side by side. Over the next four years their individual families arrived in the Valley, making the difficult journey inland from the mouth of the river to settle in the north east section of the valley. Eventually, they established themselves in the area known as Rossville. The majority of residents in Margaree today are descendants of these early families.⁷

Within twenty years of the arrival of the Ross

brothers, Margaree consisted of several communities with established institutions. The first church was established in 1822⁸ and the first school, organized by a local merchant, began before 1837.⁹ These institutions continue to be strong forces in the lives of Margaree residents. Today, three religious denominations are represented in the Valley: United, Baptist and Roman Catholic. Present educational facilities are the North East Margaree Consolidated School and the Margaree Forks District High School.

Valley inhabitants come from four ethnic backgrounds: Scottish, Irish, English and French. When communities were established in Margaree there were definite settlement patterns based on ethnic distinction. The Scots took up residence in the highlands, towards the headwaters of the river. The Irish and the English were located in the lower lands in the centre of the valley. The French (Acadians) settled furthest down river, along the Atlantic coastline. The majority of the current inhabitants in the northeast section of Margaree valley are of Scottish or English descent.

The primary industry in Margaree Valley today is

pulp cutting. The heavily wooded mountains and lowlands have provided employment for several generations. Opportunities in this field range from cutting trees to operating tree harvesters to working on reforestation programs. The pulp industry provides employment for men in communities as far as fifty miles away. Of secondary importance as a means of employment is the fishing industry. This industry most actively employs individuals from Margaree Harbour and East Margaree. The only fishing in Margaree Valley itself is recreational. Unfortunately, these two industries only provide seasonal employment, creating several months of high unemployment every year. There are a creditable number of privately owned businesses in the Valley including stores, construction companies, a fiberglass factory, carpentry workshops, restaurants and gift shops. MacPherson's General Store is one such business.

B. The Early Years:

The MacPhersons came to Margaree Valley from the Isle of Skye in 1829. In that year Donald and Sarah

(Campbell) MacPherson booked passage on a vessel sailing from Scotland to Nova Scotia. Their ship docked in St. Ann's Harbour on the east coast of Cape Breton. From there they journeyed inland to Margaree Valley. Five children came over from Scotland with Donald and Sarah, and two were born in Cape Breton. This family cleared land and built a home on five hundred acres granted to Donald MacPherson in exchange for the labour of clearing and cultivating it.¹⁰

Norman MacPherson, Donald and Sarah MacPherson's son, married Sarah Burton. They settled on his father's farm and raised a family of ten--four daughters and six sons. All of Norman's children, with the exception of one son, moved to the United States. Norman's son, Ralph E., settled in the Margaree Valley about two miles from his father's farm.¹¹ Ralph E. was the first in a line of merchants in the MacPherson family of Margaree Valley. It is here, with Ralph E., that the story of MacPherson's General Store begins.

In 1867, at the age of twelve, Ralph E. began to work to help his father support the family. He was not able to secure employment in the Valley so he left

home and walked to Port Hawkesbury, a distance of eighty-five miles. Along the way he tried to get a job but was unsuccessful; thus, when he reached Port Hawkesbury he crossed over to the mainland of Nova Scotia. He walked and hitched rides to New Brunswick where he finally obtained a job on the railroad. This job lasted six months and paid fifty cents a day. At the end of the six months, Ralph E. returned to Cape Breton, again walking the eighty-five miles from Port Hawkesbury to his home. He spent a short time in Margaree but left again to seek employment.¹²

This time Ralph E. worked for a blacksmith in Baddeck, a village thirty-five miles from his home. The blacksmith, William MacLean, kept Ralph E. with him as an apprentice for three years. He was paid twenty dollars a year. After becoming a 'master' smith, Ralph worked in Whycocomagh, another village approximately thirty miles from Baddeck. He spent a short time here but once again travelled to the mainland seeking work. He was not able to find work in Nova Scotia but did not wish to go to the United States as his siblings had, so he returned to Margaree Valley. As the story goes, Ralph E. vowed never to

leave Cape Breton again in search of employment, and never did.¹³

Margaree Valley was, by this time, in need of a blacksmith. With the encouragement of his father and the financial support of George Murray, a merchant relation, Ralph E. set up a forge. He did not have any capital but Murray wrote to a firm in Halifax, William Robertson Hardware Merchant, and asked that Ralph be supplied with twenty-five dollars worth of iron rods and bars. A second source of material was scrap iron left over from the construction of Ingraham Bridge (across the Margaree River). Although his new enterprise had a shaky start, the blacksmith forge of Ralph E. MacPherson soon became a thriving business.¹⁴ His work later expanded from making horseshoes, nails, hinges and tools, to carts, wagons, and plows. Ralph E. had become a very successful blacksmith. His son, Osgood, told about his success:

In 1909 my father was worth \$10,000. That's still a lot of money today, so you can imagine it was a lot in those days. He had his money in the Union Bank of Canada in Halifax....He took that money out and set up a store....never had much after that.¹⁵

It seems that for many years Ralph E. had kept

ILLUS. 2. Ralph E. MacPherson



certain bulk grocery items on hand: a puncheon or two of molasses, various grains and animal feed.¹⁶ Due to the business connections Ralph had established with merchants in Halifax, he was able to purchase wholesale food items. He found it economical and convenient to order foodstuffs in large quantities. When Ralph E. had a surplus of goods, he would often sell this oversupply to his neighbours.

In 1909 Ralph E. made plans to open a store. He was approached by a local merchant, Donald Frizzle, asking if he would like to purchase an established business. Ralph E. decided against such a move. This decision was explained by Ralph E.'s son, Osgood:

In 1909, Donald Frizzle, that would be James Frizzle's son, sold out his store and property so he could move out west. He offered the store and all the buildings to my father for the sum of \$2,000. He, my father, already had lands and buildings, so he told him he didn't want it and made plans to build his own store....He never thought that by not taking it he was leaving it open to be bought by competition...he never thought.¹⁷

MacPherson's property was close to Frizzle's but Ralph E. still wanted to build his store on land he already owned. He decided to move his barn, which was close to the road, and build the new store on that

site. With the site chosen, it was only a matter of time before local carpenters were hired to begin construction.

The MacDermids--Frank, his brother and his father--built the whole thing for \$900--that was inside as well as outside; the windows and sills are still there. You imagine Nat [Natalie], you couldn't build the whole thing for 9,000 [dollars] today.¹⁰

The location of the store was convenient for both the merchant and his soon-to-be customers. It was especially well situated for Ralph E. since he did not plan to close his blacksmith forge. In order to keep both businesses in operation, Ralph E. spent his days in the forge and his evenings in the store. During the day he left the shop in the care of his wife and his two youngest children, Viola and Osgood. Since the store was only one hundred feet down the road from the forge, the senior MacPherson could be easily contacted if needed. Moreover, the store was convenient for the customers because it was close to the forge. If necessary, shopping could be done while waiting in turn at the forge.

MacPherson's General Store was located on a straight stretch of road in the center of Margaree

Valley from which one could easily see houses, farmlands, and mountains far off in the distance. On either side of the store was a white picket fence; on the right, this fence separated the store property from the merchant's home, and on the left, the fence marked the grounds of the Margaree Valley Baptist Church. The original shop was small, measuring 24 x 60 feet. It was a two storey building with a mansard roof and a central doorway. On either side of the door were two large plate glass windows, one of which bore black lettering which read:

R. MacPherson

General Merchant

Frizzleton N.S. 19

More obvious to passers-by was a sign over the door bearing the same message. There were windows at the far ends of both side walls and two second storey windows at the front facing the road. The exterior was painted white with black trim and, decorating the front of the store, across the large windows, was a black iron railing made by Ralph E. in his forge.

In 1909 the interior of MacPherson's store resembled other general stores of the period. It was

ILLUS. 3. Window Inscription



sparsely furnished, wholly functional and aesthetically pleasing in a very stark and barren way. The front door opened into a large room with long hardwood counters on both sides, shelves and bins behind them. There was no center aisle. In the middle of the room was a coal burning pot-belly stove. This stove was the only source of heat in the building.²⁰

Behind the counter on the left the yard goods, sewing notions, stationery items and casket furnishings were shelved. In the yard goods section there were several kinds of cotton and flannel materials--"the quality good even if the selection was limited."²¹ Sewing notions included ribbons, snaps, hooks, needles and thread; also in this department one could purchase starched white collars for men's shirts, and gloves and hats for the ladies. Stationery items or school supplies included slates, slate pencils, bottles of ink, pen holders and pen nibs.²² Casket furnishings were set apart from the other supplies. Casket or coffin furnishings included dark cotton material to cover the actual coffin inside and out, and handles (plain or fancy) to

adorn the exterior of the casket.²³ The merchant sold these furnishings while local carpenters made and sold the coffins.

The right side of the store was almost identical to the left, except it was much more crowded. The shelves behind the counter were filled to capacity and on the floor large bins held bulk items. On two of the shelves and the counter top many varieties of candy were stored. The candies on the shelves were in boxes, "with just enough space between them (the boxes) to fit your hand in."²⁴ These boxes held 'filled chocolates' and two kinds of fudge, vanilla and chocolate. The glass jars on the counter top held hard candy which came in sticks and smaller pieces of all shapes, sizes and flavours. Tobacco was also sold at this counter. Of the several choices one had to make in this department the biggest was whether to buy chewing or smoking tobacco. Next to the tobacco, and taking up much more room, was the medicinal center. Here one was able to find a cure for anything from mild skin irritations to "summer complaint."²⁵ For the ladies, there were a few vanity items guaranteed to prevent wrinkles without encouraging

hair growth.²⁶ On the floor in the bins were grocery items bought in bulk: sugar, beans, flour, oatmeal, cornmeal, soda, sulphur, raisins, dates, tea, pilot biscuits or hard tack, and one special bin lined with tin for matches.

On both counters sat scales of different sizes, and behind each counter there was an iron paper holder containing a large roll of brown paper.²⁷ Purchases were wrapped individually and tied with string pulled from the cone of twine attached to the ceiling over the counter top. In later years Ralph E. designed a paper bag holder that was suspended over the counters. This contraption was circular with iron hooks hanging from it at regular intervals. The paper bags were hung from the hooks according to size (five, ten, fifteen, and twenty pound bags). When a bag was needed the merchant reached up and pulled down the required one.²⁸ Since this side of the shop was obviously the busiest, Ralph E. also had the cash drawer here. A bell was attached to the handle so that it could not be opened silently. Each day began with a float of ten dollars in the drawer. Extra cash was kept in the merchant's office at the back of the

room.

Ralph E.'s office was reached by walking up a ramp at the back of the store. The purpose for this office was to give the merchant privacy while he worked on his ledgers or counted his daily earnings. The only furniture in the room was a large roll-top desk, a chair and a clock on the wall. Directly in front of the desk was a window which looked out over the entire store; from this position Ralph E. could keep an eye on everything that happened in his store.

In the centre of the wall at the back of the store was a door that opened into a room rather like a small porch. This room served as a storage area for a variety of kegs and barrels; barrels of apples, kegs of nails and fence staples, the large molasses puncheon, with its pump, measuring almost five feet, and smaller containers of cider and vinegar.²⁹ Each of these puncheons, barrels and kegs had a special way of being tapped. A hole had to be drilled in the top of the puncheon of molasses with a hand drill, in order to insert the pump. Often, when the bottom of the puncheon was reached, the individual buying molasses would find wood chips in the product

as a result of the drilling. At the top of this pump was a dial that was set before the crank was turned. The dial could be set to measure anywhere from one to four gallons of molasses. On the surface of the dial was a large raised dot. When the set amount was pumped out, the needle would have reached the raised dot and the handle would no longer turn. Ralph's grandson was quick to point out that cranking this large pump in the summer was easy, in the winter, however, the molasses was very thick and cold which made the pumping much more difficult. The cider and vinegar kegs had wooden spigots with stoppers inserted into the side of the keg. For these two liquids the spigots had to be wooden so the acid in the product would not corrode them. Kerosene was pumped similarly to the molasses. During the war years, the dial on this pump was rigidly regulated by an inspector from the Government Department of Weights and Measures. The inspector came around monthly to set the pump. If the official found that the pump had been tampered with, he would fine the merchant.³⁰ Nail kegs were opened from the top and nails were scooped out by the handful to be weighed.³¹ Other goods

stored in this back room included barn and clay shovels and picks, buckets, wooden hay rakes and metal gravel rakes, hoes, hand scythes and sharpening stones, wooden handles for all these tools, harnesses and sundry grooming articles for horses, salt-licks for animals, and outdoor garden poison.

Many of Ralph E.'s business transactions were carried out by barter or trade. In both the forge and the general store, he provided goods and services in exchange for other favours. In his ledgers from the forge, one can read that horse shoes or repairs to wagons, sleds and carts earned Ralph a load of wood, hide for moccasins, a bushel of barley, sheets of birch bark and even a fishing rod.³² His store records give accounts of groceries provided in exchange for a day's work at his house, shingles, hay or a trip to Margaree Harbour or Baddeck to pick up supplies. This system was beneficial for both customer and merchant--one receiving goods and repairs, the other having errands and chores completed. Ralph E.'s son, Osgood, remembers the time when barter was a common practice:

I remember them [customers] bringing in a

tub of butter and half of it full of salt. There was some butter you never sold in the store because people [local] wouldn't eat it. People would want to know who made it so you sent it away, and the people you sent it to said, "Well, that's good Margaree butter!" We shipped the butter to North Sydney, to Brennan's, and they'd ship it to Newfoundland. You have some of that over there yet, Nat!.... Oh the tubs would be that high [two feet] and just packed solid. They'd weigh twenty-five pounds or so.

They'd [the locals] bring in eggs that went on their account too. Many's the time and, well, you know an egg when they're rotten! They'd [the eggs] go out on the stonepile afterwards.

The butter and eggs would be credited to their account, very seldom was there payment on money. They always owed.³³

Most people in Margaree Valley in the early 1900's were farmers and it was often necessary for Ralph E. to extend credit for several months, until the crops were harvested; even then he often took payment in terms of farm produce and manual labour. Ralph E. accepted whatever payments the customers could make. If it was produce he sold what he could in his shop, and what did not sell was exported to nearby communities for sale there.

Although barter was an accepted form of business, unfortunately it often led to credit with the promise that once the hay was made or the crops sold, the

merchant would receive payment. However as Ralph E.'s son was careful to note, "they always owed".³⁴ The general store merchant always carried the burden of some customers that were either unable or unwilling to pay off their accounts. Sometimes these debts were never paid. Ralph E.'s daughter pointed out that many people died leaving the businessman with a debt that more often than not he would never collect:

You wouldn't believe all the people that dad buried for free. People that died and their relatives never paid dad....He would let the bills go for seven years and then they were no good, you know.³⁵

Credit customers were as much of a concern to the old-time merchant as they are to merchants of today. Most businessmen tried to keep a close rein on their credit customers by not permitting the sum to go over a set amount, and many merchants tried to discourage people from even asking for credit. A common way of stating the merchant's attitude towards credit was by posting notes and signs that left no doubt as to how he felt about this practice. Ralph E. tried a couple of ways to tell his patrons that credit was unacceptable, the most obvious being verbal

explanations when the matter was approached and secondly by putting up notices within his shop. He had a large sign in his store, hanging over the right hand counter by the cash drawer. This sign was painted green and looked like a clock. On the face of the clock was the message, "NO TICK HERE."³⁶ Written notice was also posted in his establishment to the effect that all accounts were to be settled promptly or these matters would be turned over to a collections officer. A copy of one of these notices was found on the back cover of his store ledger for the year 1910.

NOTICE

All persons who have not settled their accounts to date are urgently requested to do so as soon as possible, as after [blank], all unsettled accounts will be handed over to a Justice of the Peace for immediate collection.³⁷

Although such signs and notices appeared periodically in his store, they really meant very little and his customers knew that. The daybooks from MacPherson's store clearly show that Ralph E. did extend credit services.

Ralph's ledgers were large hand-constructed books, covered with leather or oilcloth and tied together with string. These books contained page

after page of daily business transactions, indicating which service in the forge or item in the store had been charged to an individual villager. The format of each entry was the same:

	Margaree	Date
TO:	Name of person receiving the goods, Service, or article purchased	
	Price	
Per	Name of person who actually picked up the goods, i.e. husband, son or neighbour, etc.	

An actual entry looked like this:

	Margaree	August 17, 1887
TO	Wesley Ross	
	2 1/2 yds cloth	
	85c	per Hannah

If a barter had taken place, a credit note was made instead of listing the price:

November 13, 1879		
TO	Edward Carmichael	N.E. Margaree
	4 new shoes on horse	had nails
	Cr. by making flue	
		per self 30

June 29, 1880		
TO	Samuel Morrison	N.E. Margaree
	4 shoes rem. 60c	
	Cr. by 1 fishing rod	
		per self 30

Often the individuals were referred to by their community nicknames rather than their legal names,

i.e. "Red John" or even "Red John's son". The long pages of the ledgers were covered with well executed penmanship. In the earliest account books, the handwriting is that of Ralph E., but later the task of keeping the books up-to-date fell to Mrs. MacPherson and her youngest daughter, Viola. Most of the names in the ledgers are of men. Although women did shop at the store, they were more likely to write out a grocery order and have their husbands or some other male family member pick it up. For the selection of special items, such as material or clothing, the women would often want to go to the store to make their choice--this however was not always possible. Ralph E.'s daughter told how her dress material was selected, and how even her shoes were purchased by her father:

Every year Dad made a trip to Halifax, a buying trip, and we could hardly wait for him to come back. I remember one time that he brought back material for dresses for me. He would always bring mother material for new curtains and for her house dresses. One time he even brought material for mother to make clothes for Os [Osgood] and a suit for himself.

We got our shoes in the store too. I always got my shoes out of the store. And one time I was allowed to order shoes on my

own. Dad usually did the ordering. I ordered a pair of shoes from the agent when he was around. I got a pair with a heel on them. I wanted a heel. I was sick of those old brogands that we usually had to wear. Well, the first time that I wore those shoes in front of dad he said, "Where did you get those things? I was surprised and said I had ordered them from the agent. He told me to take them off and get a pair of sensible shoes. Mother was in back laughing. I had to take them off, but I wore them whenever dad wasn't around! He didn't like them because he said I was too tall to wear a shoe with a heel."⁴⁰

Shopping, in the days of Ralph E., was very different than it is today. The customer was waited upon by the merchant or the clerks, and never thought of walking around the store making his or her own selection. It was not that the merchant did not trust his patrons, but more a form of business courtesy to serve each customer individually. Ralph's grandson explained it this way:

When you walked in the front door, you walked into an open store. I mean a counter on two sides with bins and shelves behind them, and no center aisle or shelves. You would either place your order verbally, or you would hand the clerk a slip of paper with the order written on it. You came up to the clerk and asked for two pounds of beans, sugar or whatever, and he weighed it out for you and set it on the counter. Then you asked for whatever other items you wanted, and he got them for you and set them on the counter....You didn't get anything,

until you paid for it.⁴¹
 Due to the individual attention granted each customer, it was necessary to have at least two people in the store during the busy daytime hours. In the case of MacPherson's store, it was usually Mrs. MacPherson and one of her children in the store during the day; Ralph E. would take over in the evening. Ralph's daughter recalled how difficult and sometimes frustrating it was to try to run both a home a business simultaneously:

It wasn't easy, one person in the store, now I'm tellin' you... [you'd have] six or seven from the Big Intervale, Big Brook, and all around [at the same time]. I was in the store most of the time anyway, but we had a bell at the front of the store connected to the house. If people wanted into the store they pulled the bell. When I worked in the Post Office for Aunt Lil, mother'd be alone [in the store]. Sometimes she'd have to leave the potatoes on the stove and they'd burn dry. We'd come in the house and dinner'd be ruined.

That didn't go on for long though. I worked out there later on, someone was there all the time. I guess that was after we moved the Post Office [into the store].⁴²

With Viola in the store it was much easier on Mrs. MacPherson.

The MacPherson home was also used as a boarding place for the local school teacher, and the travelling

agents from Halifax who arrived in the Valley periodically. It was common for the MacPherson dinner table to seat four or five extras for meals. Often, when people from eight or ten miles away would drive to the Valley for supplies or blacksmith work, they were given food and lodging at Ralph's home.⁴³ If his wife and daughter were busy in the store, he offered his home, the teapot, and homemade bread and molasses to anyone willing to accept the offer. In the winter it was also necessary to water, feed and put the horses in the barn while their owners waited their turn at the forge. Ralph E.'s niece remembers, very clearly, the extra people at mealtime:

...they'd talk up around the forge. They'd be up there for hours. Now like the Big Intervale people, they made a day of it. They might come down to have a horse shod and maybe there'd be three or four people before them, well, they'd have to wait. They'd either be at our place or your grandfather's for dinner. It was nothing for... Aunt Tilly to have three or four extra for dinner. This was the hub where everything happened. Everything was brought down here...⁴⁴

As at present, the merchants in 1909 had their share of problems with dishonest customers. Undoubtedly, it was more difficult to shoplift with

Everything in bins and behind counter, but it was done. Certain individuals, known for their dishonesty, were watched carefully by clerks and shopkeeper alike. In fact, the merchant's office was usually positioned in such a way that he could overlook the entire store and watch both clerk and patron.⁴⁵ Of course, if a person was intent on stealing, he was usually able to find a way. One story that shows ingenuity on the part of both merchant and thief is told by a Margaree merchant's daughter:

Another time Dad was waiting for [names a suspected thief]. He had just gotten in a shipment of alarm clocks and he figured these would catch [suspect's] eye. So one day he saw her arriving at the store. He went around and wound up and set the alarms on every one of the clocks. He set the alarms to ring just a few seconds apart. So, once again she sent him to the back room to look for something. He just took his time out back until just before the alarms were set to go off. He walked back into the store and the alarms were ringing, and one was ringing under [suspect's] hat! She just took off her hat, placed the clock on the counter and walked out. Bold as brass!⁴⁶

Butter and eggs were common items for bartering.

They are also the products that have the most stories told about them: One of the most common tales about

theft in a general store is told about a man trying to steal butter. To let the gentleman know that he had been caught, the merchant employed slow torture. The merchant, as the story goes, detains the man by entering into a conversation with him. As he is talking, the merchant stokes the fire. In a very short time, the butter, hidden under the customer's hat, begins to melt and run down his face. After the customer is sufficiently embarrassed, the merchant ends the conversation and ushers him out the door.⁴⁷

Other stories that show the customer trying to outwit the merchant are told about eggs. Ralph E.'s son told about the eggs often being rotten when they were initially brought to the store.⁴⁸ A variation on this story is told about the way that one Margaree area merchant dealt with someone trying to steal his eggs. His daughter remembered this story:

Yes, I remember one time in the store, the [names suspected customers] used to steal from him you know. Well, he decided he'd fix them! Eggs used to come in flats in those days, and he knew that some eggs were disappearing. So, one day, the one that he suspected came into the store. She was a big woman, and this day she had a dress on with big pockets in it. She sent dad out to the back room to get something for her, she always needed something in the back room.

So he went back to get whatever it was and he knew that when he was gone, she'd taken some eggs. When he came out, he walked up to her and said, "Well, it's a lovely day, isn't it?" And as he said this, he reached out and slapped her on the leg, on the pocket of her dress. With that, he smashed all of the stolen eggs in her pocket!⁴⁹

Another form of shoplifting, but one more readily accepted by the merchant, was the sometimes heavy-handed sampling techniques practiced by many of the regular visitors to the store. If the round of cheese was left uncovered, then 'regulars' thought nothing of shaving off a piece with their pocket knives. The biscuits and bulk cookies often had a similar fate befall them. Candy, and especially filled chocolates, were a favourite with some visitors. A couple of daring young clerks in Margaree created a trap to fix one fellow's freeloading tendencies for a long time:

On the main counter we used to have chocolates, bulk candy, in great big glass jars...with a scoop in it, and whenever you wanted a candy, you scooped it out. They were pretty well all Ganong chocolates or french cremes, or this sort of stuff...peppermints. [Names customer] used to come in and take chocolates. So this day [names clerk] and [names other clerk] got some chocolates, took a hot knife, cut the tops off them, hollowed them out, went outside,

got some fresh cow manure, filled the chocolates, put the tops back together... used the knife to kind of seal the chocolates--so you wouldn't know the difference. They had three or four chocolates like this. So [customer] came in. [Clerk] had the scoop ready and all of a sudden they passed him a chocolate. [Customer] eats the chocolate. He's downed one and he's onto the second one when he realizes what he's eating!⁵⁰

Along with regular patrons, including those with dishonest inclinations, the merchant had to be able to deal with those customers who had known peculiarities. Every community has its eccentrics, and Margaree is no exception. This list included those who would only shop when there was no one in the store except the merchant, or people who always came to shop just minutes before the business was closing. All types of people frequented the general store, and the old-time merchant had to be ready to meet the needs of all these customers. Often the best way to deal with such a wide range of personalities was to rely on one's sense of humour. Two types of humour were prevalent in the Valley merchants: the practical jokers,⁵¹ and those with a quick, sharp, dry humour, "wit" as it is referred to locally. Ralph E. was known as a

"witty" man:⁵²

Your great-grandfather...gosh, he was a witty man. You know...on time, I was just a young fellow...I remember he was always in the store in the evenings....One night there was a Credit Union meeting and everyone gathered at the store [beforehand]. He saw all the young men gathered around and said, 'Jingus! You're all dressed up now! What's going on this evening?' One man answered, 'It's a Credit Union meeting.' He [Ralph] turned away and said, 'Jingus! I've been running one of those all my life! Jingus! Well, Jingus!' That was a saying of his [Ralph E.'s], 'Jingus! Jingus!'⁵³

Although a sense of humour may be the first personality trait spoken of by those who still remember Ralph E., further conversation always reveals that he was thought to be "a good merchant." This generalization refers to his interaction with his clientele. He offered friendship to everyone who entered his forge or his store. His advice was sought on matter of business, religion, law and love. Because the local merchant was usually first to receive outside news, Ralph E. had to perform a variety of duties. He was the one who received war news, publicized election returns, and reported on the winner of the most recent boxing match.⁵⁴ Sometimes it was his responsibility to answer letters from

people seeking information about fishing season and hunting licenses, birth certificates, death certificates. He even supplied legal will forms and was often called upon to be a witness.⁵⁵

When describing the roles of an old-time general store merchant, it sometimes does not seem plausible that one man and his business could offer so much to a community. The local store keeper was an important figure in rural society; depending on his personality, he could be a kind or a foreboding figure. In Margaree Valley, Ralph E. MacPherson was viewed as a kind and generous man. He was stern in appearance and manner, but his friends and family knew there was much kindness beneath that exterior. His home was always open to any traveller or local visitor for food and lodging, and in business Ralph was known for his honesty and integrity. Viola, Ralph's daughter, remembered being instructed on this moral issue:

It was hard work [in the store], weighing out sugar and nails and yard goods... and selling shoes. Oh! and when we measured, did we have to measure sixteen ounces to a pound, or whatever! Dad made sure we got that right -- never under. He'd rather give more than gyp someone. He was honest, alright, and everyone knew that. He was honest.⁵⁶

Ralph E. treated everyone fairly and expected the same in return. He commanded respect by his very presence. However, Ralph E. was also known as someone who enjoyed a good joke. He was not beyond demonstrating a happy disposition by giving a little jig or playing a tune on the jew's harp while sitting on the store steps with one of his cronies during a summer evening. His daughter recalled:⁵⁷

In the summer evenings Dad would be sitting out on the front steps [of the store]. [names neighbour] would come down every evening and sit and talk with dad. Sometimes Dad would play the jew's harp in the quiet evenings. He'd even give a step every now and then. Oh! he'd give a couple of steps and then go into the office to do some work.⁵⁸

His interactions with other merchants of the day were limited unless they sought him out. He spent every day in the forge and each evening in his store so there was not much time for outside socializing. However, Ralph E. did make time to visit one other merchant in the Valley. Even this was done with exactitude. His daughter pointed out just how much he was a creature of habit:

Every Saturday evening Dad would walk over to Albert Ingraham's to visit. He would

always bring home a bag of candy, French cremes. We knew he would have the candy but we weren't allowed to have any until after lunch on Sunday. He would have enough candy to treat us kids every day of the week. We could hardly wait for Dad to treat us!⁵⁹

Albert Ingraham had a store almost directly across from Ralph's on the other side of the river. Ralph E. would treat himself to a visit with Albert on Saturday evening after his own store closed at nine p.m., as that was the end of his work week. Albert's store had a large open front porch and would hold many. Most likely by the time that Ralph E. walked over the river, the porch held more people than just Albert and himself. This would be a perfect forum for Ralph and his dry sense of humour. Anyone who tried to extract more information from him than he was willing to divulge, or made a comment that he did not think was appropriate, was treated to one of Ralph's retorts; "if someone made a comment that deserved a sharp reply, it didn't take him long."⁶⁰ Following the merriment of Saturday evening, Sunday was a day of church, rest and very little else. Both the store and the forge were closed on Sundays.

To summarize, for thirty years, Ralph E.

MacPherson owned and operated a general store in Margaree Valley, Cape Breton Island.⁶¹ Many of these years were not prosperous ones for his small shop, but he managed to survive by making use of available sidelines. When his first venture, a blacksmith forge, was no longer able to support his large family, he opened a general store.⁶² At a time when the store had troubles, he was able to supplement this income by securing the position of postmaster; he or some member of his family held this office for thirty years.⁶³

C. The Middle Years, 1942-1978

This introduction of the Post Office into MacPherson's store marked the beginning of generations of business diversification within the context of a general store. Over the years, under the influence of Osgood, Ralph E.'s son, this small local store would close and reopen as any one or combination of the following: soda fountain, theatre, canteen, garage, small engine repair shop and grocery store.

All nine of Ralph E.'s children, like so many other Maritimers, moved to the United States to seek their fortune. Only one returned. Repeating his father's pattern, Osgood chose to return to Margaree Valley. His first job, when he came back to Cape Breton, was with the Department of Highways:

See that lake, Nat? [Natalie] Well, there's a point of land there. No! I don't see it. It must be gone. Well, I worked out here on the road. I worked for two and a half dollars a day. That was a pretty good wage then.

I had a small blacksmith shop on that point of land. It wasn't much of a shop, just a small shed with, oh! I can't explain it to you, a blower and a few tools. I could shoe horses or sharpen tools. Well, that was the year I saw my first Stanley Steamer [car]. It was Americans that had it and boy! What a beautiful car! We were working on the road, laying culverts, and we had to lay the boards for the Stanley Steamer to pass. They had to sit and wait for us. It was a beautiful car!⁶⁴

Although Osgood had been trained by his father to be a blacksmith, this was the only time he actually worked as a smith. His next employment was as a lumber-camp cook in Badger, Newfoundland. Living in Newfoundland lasted only long enough for Osgood to earn money for his passage back to Cape Breton. This time he was prepared to make Margaree Valley his home.

Osgood married when he returned home in 1933, moved in with his parents, and became a partner in his father's business.⁶⁵ This arrangement worked well as Ralph E.'s primary interest was smithing and Osgood excelled at shopkeeping. The character of the store changed in response to Osgood's interests and personality. He was a progressive merchant. Osgood bought his first car in 1922, so it was not surprising that his first addition to the store was gasoline. Gas pumps were installed at MacPherson's store in 1934. The first brand of gasoline sold was Imperial,⁶⁶ and before electricity was brought to the Valley, the pump had to be worked by hand:

The pump had a big long handle that you worked back and forth until the globe was filled. There was ten gallons in the globe. You pumped to the top, to the zero mark. If you pumped early in the morning, you only pumped to the one mark because when the sun hit it, it would expand. In the winter, you had to pump above the zero because it would contract. It wasn't a very accurate measure, but it was all that we had. The nozzle hung on the pump and it locked. Nobody took their own gas. The globe was gravity drained, through the hose to the car. Gas was a beautiful colour, then, red....⁶⁷

There were few cars in Margaree Valley at this time, but with the installation of gas pumps at the

store and a much younger merchant behind the counter, the clientele at MacPherson's store underwent a change. Now, not only did Ralph E.'s friends gather in the store, but Osgood's companions began to gather there as well:

Ralph E. did not approve of cars. He would rather walk than drive anywhere, and above all, he said, 'cars should not be used on Sundays.'⁶⁸

Amidst these changes Ralph E. found solace in his forge, but the automobile invaded there as well:

He would work on car springs if you brought 'em to the forge, and do a bit of welding but no more. He hated cars because they took from his business. There was still an ample supply of horses to keep his shop going but...it used to be so many things required the maintenance of a blacksmith: farm equipment, wagons, plows, mowers....⁶⁹

Osgood incorporated his love of driving and his existing business setup to establish a taxi service in Margaree Valley. In 1939 he bought a Chevrolet with the gear shift on the steering wheel, 'the first Chevy,' he said, 'to come to Cape Breton'.⁷⁰ This was an added plus for his taxi because now he could put another passenger in the front seat:

Most people in the war years had no cars, so he drove a taxi. The train left

Inverness at five a.m. so he would go to Inverness then, or drive people to the doctor's. Sometimes he'd make two or three trips a day. For shopping sprees at Christmas, we'd take a 1 1/2 ton truck. People would pile in the back and we'd cover'er with a tarp. Sometimes we'd go in the afternoon and the evening. ...it wasn't until after World War II that people bought cars. Before that people came to their cabins [in Margaree Valley] for two weeks at a time. They had no cars. When cars became available, gas sales increased. We had a rationing system during the war. You had to have coupons for gas, sugar, butter and tea. You had one book to last a year. There were always extra coupons. Sometimes they were never collected. We always had gas because Dad had a taxi licence.⁷¹

Osgood was able to get new cars during the war because of his taxi business and his acquaintance with a car dealer in Sydney, Nova Scotia. This dealer was R.J. Logue Ltd. Osgood bought seventeen Chevrolets in a row from this dealer. He was forced to get a used car during the war, a Pontiac, because no new ones were available, 'the cars wore out quickly in the taxi business.'⁷²

Driving a taxi and managing a general store kept Osgood busy but he loved a challenge. In 1940 when his uncle G.W. MacPherson, brought a generator from New York to his inn in Margaree Valley, Osgood was quick to offer to help set it up.⁷³ This generating

system did not have sufficient power to service the inn but it was ideal for MacPherson's store and house.

Thus the 32-volt generator was set up in the back of the garage. Osgood's son remembers the generator very clearly, and the replacement of Ralph E.'s kerosene lamps by Osgood's generator and light bulbs:

G.W. bought the generator for the Normaway but it was too small. It didn't have enough capacity for that place. It came from New York, so G.W. bought a bigger one for the Normaway and gave the other one to Dad.... We had electricity long before it came around here. We had our own generator plant. It was a 32-volt system [110 V, today]. This was in the days of the feedroom, before the theatre. The gasoline generator was made of 16 storage batteries. There were eight on one shelf and eight on the another, hooked in parallel. We ran the generator once a day. Dad knew how much we would need for a day, so he put that much gas in in the morning. The water level had to be maintained. There was a red ball and a yellow ball to tell the levels. Dad was sort of a mechanic, so he learned on this smaller generator and was often called to repair the big one at the Normaway.... The generator made our store, probably. When most others still had lamps it was pretty special to see lights in the store at night.

The generator system exhausted in the graveyard. You could hear it all over [the valley] because there was no noise of vehicle traffic. This was during a time when if you heard an airplane, everyone stopped and ran out of the house to see it.... My grandfather [Ralph E.] was still alive when we had the generator plant. He would have

seen it but not cared much for it, it was noisy and smelled.⁷⁴

Electricity made way for radios and other appliances in the valley. Osgood's son, Ralph R., remembers his father's first radio:

Our first radio was a crystal set. Static was a real problem, it was very noisy, there was no equipment to overcome the static. You had to listen to it with earphones. There were no speakers.

I remember a Joe Louis fight. Our kitchen would be so full you could hardly move. It wasn't just friends, but neighbours, and anyone interested in boxing. The fight would start at eleven p.m., our time. At the first of the evening, they played cards and made wagers on Joe Louis. This was with a battery radio so everyone could hear.

You could always get the war news, how things were overseas. Gabriel Heater was the ten p.m. newscaster with the war news. You could hear American stations and you would find out when a convoy left Halifax... 'A is for apple to be carried out' was the code.... We could listen to New Carlisle, Quebec. Nobody knew what they were saying, but we'd listen to it anyway.⁷⁵

Electrical equipment needed to be maintained and repaired. Osgood taught himself this trade from a Service Manual and a Direction Booklet obtained from the National Radio Institute, Washington, D.C. Most radios were too large to be moved so Osgood would

travel to individual homes to carry out repairs. Eventually his work with radios led to repair and servicing General Electric appliances:

Dad sold and repaired radios. They were six volt battery radios. He took a course through the National Radio Institute. They were tube-type radios, with a tube tester sold by General Electric. There was an oscillator and very good condensers. He first sold Marconi radios, then General Electric in conjunction with his other business. Radios in those days were big and bulky. He had to go to the homes to repair them. He was sort of like a doctor who made house calls.⁷⁶

After Ralph E.'s death in 1942, his forge closed and his store became the sole responsibility of Osgood. It was not easy to keep a business going during the war years.⁷⁷ In the next several years, Osgood was forced to diversify more and more from the family general store business. He downgraded the business from a grocery store to a type of convenience store:

...we didn't keep feed and specialized more in fishing gear, sport fishing gear such as rods and flies. We still had things like pop, gas, cigarettes and candy...it still looked like the old store.⁷⁸

During the hard times that followed the war, the store was forced to close more than once.

The taxi business continued to flourish since cars were not common and gasoline was rationed carefully. In fact, after the war it was still difficult to get cars. In 1947, Osgood had to replace his worn out taxi with a used car in only slightly better condition. As a complement to the taxi enterprise, Osgood opened an automobile service center in 1947. This service area was located in the warehouse/feedroom section of the store complex. Services offered were: tire repair, spark plug replacement, oil changes, and general tune-ups.

By 1951, people had money to spend on entertainment. In an attempt to re-open the store as a functional premise in the early 1950's, Osgood and his wife Anne opened a soda fountain and a theatre. This was definitely something new and different in Margaree Valley, and it proved to be the right time to get involved in the entertainment business. Osgood's son Ralph R. remembers this time period:

During the time it was a convenience store, we bought a soda fountain and put it in there. We brought milkshakes, sundaes and soda to the country. They were never here before. There was a carbonator, to make pop sort of. It was a complete unit in itself, with other small units for the syrup--

ILLUS. 4. MacPherson's Store 1952



chocolate, vanilla and strawberry. On your right, as you come in the door, were the stools. We could sell all of the milkshakes we could make and all the ice cream we could buy. Then pop became readily available. There was Nesbitt's Orange that said, 'Oranges Right From California,' Iron Brew, and Ginger Beer. There were no disposable cups, so if you had a soda you had to stay right there and drink it. The glasses had to be washed.⁷⁹ -

Osgood's theatre was known as "The Hi-Da-Way," and once again he was able to utilize the warehouse as viable business property. The entryway was directly over what had once been the grease pit in the service and repair shop. The screen was on the far end wall and the seats were made of wooden slats, like park benches. Some of the movie titles were: Lassie, Old Yeller, The Bells of St. Mary's, Love Me Tender, Hop-Along-Cassidy serials, Chicken Every Sunday, Gone With The Wind, and Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire movies. There was one show on Friday night, and usually a full house. Osgood had fond memories of the theatre days:

I showed pictures for a long time in the 'Hi-Da-Way.' I used to charge forty cents for adults and twenty-five cents for children. We sold popcorn and pop and stuff down in the store part, behind the counters. Do you remember those counters? That was when the store was still set up the old way,

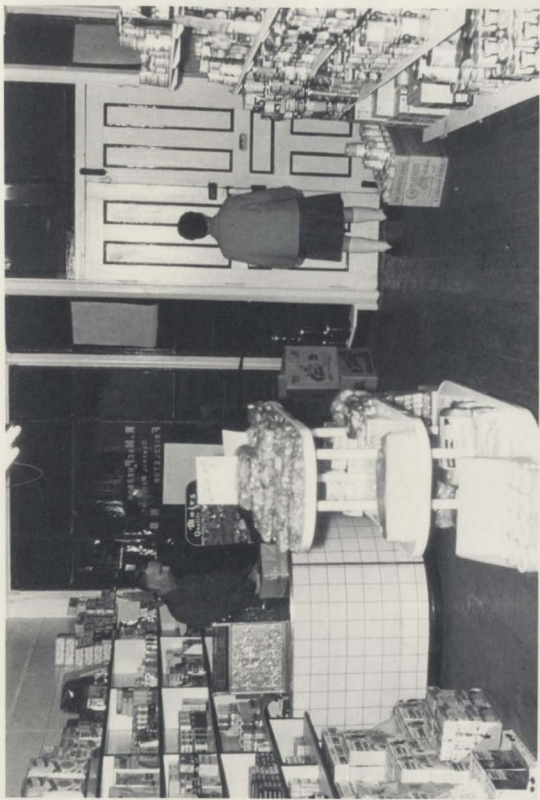
with counters. When television came in I lost all my business. But I made enough money on shows to pay off all my debts and start the store again.⁸⁰

The debts that Osgood referred to were incurred during the war years when he closed and re-opened his business four times.

In 1956, he decided to re-open a grocery store. He had paid off his debts but did not have enough capital to stock the shelves in his store. Once again, Osgood showed his ingenuity. He signed an agreement with the local Co-operative Store Organization. The agreement was that the Co-Op could rent MacPherson's store for three or four years and put their goods on the shelves. Osgood would be the manager. This business deal worked well for Osgood; he was given a salaried position in the store that he loved. Osgood's association with the Co-Op lasted three years, until 1959.

The year 1959 was a very significant one for MacPherson's store and for its owner. Following the already established pattern of Ralph E. and Osgood, Ralph R. [Osgood's son] returned home from the mainland to Margaree Valley. He joined in partnership

ILLUS. 5. Osgood MacPherson, 1959



with his father in the family business. Once again, the store underwent revision. The 'Hi-Da-Way' was converted back into a warehouse, the Post Office moved from the rear of the store into the merchant's house and the former Post Office area was redesigned as a meat counter and display area. The old fashioned interior of the store was remodeled by taking out the counter on the left side of the store, adding three individual shelving units for the pre-packaged foods which converted the open space in the center of the store into aisles, and removing the last vestige of the old general store--the stove. As Ralph R. said:

In 1959 there was still a coal stove, a warm-morning-heater, in the middle of the store. It was a model 97 Blazer, pot-bellied stove with a coal scuttle beside it. This stove didn't suit the new image we wanted to give the store.⁸¹

In the fall of 1959 Osgood and Ralph R. opened their store. Not only was the facade new but the name was now MacPherson's Lucky Dollar Store.⁸² This time the store was operating as a chain store, one of thirty-three 'Lucky Dollar Stores' in the Maritime provinces. The advantages associated with being a chain store were that it offered MacPherson's the

option of buying groceries through a central wholesale outlet in Sydney, Nova Scotia,⁸³ and the weekly specials were now listed and publicized in the local newspaper, the Sydney Post.

In 1962, Ralph R. and Osgood decided they needed more diversification, so they built an extension on the right side of the store. The extension became a small canteen serving fast foods and ice cream concoctions to the accompaniment of 1960s jukebox songs. The canteen was staffed by Osgood's wife, Anne, daughter Sherry and Ralph's wife Lena.⁸⁴ Also at this time Ralph R. decided to use his mechanical knowledge and open a two-cycle machine shop at the far end of the warehouse. This machine shop proved to be the better of the two sidelines. The canteen closed in 1966 and became storage space while the machine shop is still in operation today.

The 1960s were profitable years for the Lucky Dollar Store. Not since Ralph E.'s early days as a shopkeeper had MacPherson's store been so busy. The largest contributing factor towards the successful 60s' in Margaree Valley was the introduction of Nova Scotia Forest Industries into the area. This

organization brought with it employment opportunities that people in Margaree Valley had not seen since the early 1900s. At that time a major pulpwood contractor from the state of Maine had a similar operation on the mountain. Nova Scotia Forest Industries not only brought pulpwood contractors and their men into the Valley but they were able to provide employment for every local male wanting to work.⁸⁵ One result of such a centralized and nearby industry was that N.S.F.I. came directly into Margaree Valley looking for supplies. Thus small businesses, like MacPherson's, vied for the option of supplying the men on the mountain. Fortunately for the MacPhersons, their store was at the base of the mountain, only 500 yards from the road that led to the woods. Ralph R. expanded his already busy two-cycle machine shop to encompass stocking, selling and repairing chainsaws for the pulp industry. Business at the general store increased as N.S.F.I. took advantage of MacPherson's weekly trek to Sydney for supplies and began ordering their camp supplies through this avenue. Although the Lucky Dollar was a small store, it was able to compete for the lumber

camp business with the only larger chain store in the Valley.⁸⁶ First, MacPherson's regularly sent a truck to Sydney, so goods were guaranteed to arrive and any shortages in stock could simply be supplemented from the store supplies and second, they offered free delivery back to the camps on the mountains.

Tuesday was always the day for supplies to be picked up in Sydney. Ralph R., or one of his drivers, would leave Margaree Valley at 5:30 a.m., every Tuesday, heading for Glace Bay, Nova Scotia.⁸⁷ This is where all of the dry goods would be loaded from Chernin's warehouse. By 7:00 a.m., MacPherson's truck was in Sydney, waiting for the Canada Packers' warehouse to open. Here they bought meat, vegetables, and fruit. MacPherson's truck would be back in the Valley by mid-afternoon. When the truck arrived at the store, everyone came out to help. Groceries were unloaded from the truck, down to the steps of the store, on two metal rollers. The family all helped sort out and dispense the boxes when they reached the store. Anyone else just standing around pitched in and carried boxes as well. Osgood's granddaughter has

vivid memories of Tuesdays in the store:

My favourite part was when the potatoes were unloaded. We were always allowed to help with the ten pound bags. Everyone formed a line, the metal rollers were taken away, and the person on the truck threw the potatoes to the next person in line. Potatoes passed from person to person until they were stacked neatly on the floor of the store.

I remember that meat was the last thing taken from the truck. To my eyes, a side of beef was about the biggest thing I could ever imagine anyone carrying. I can still see the strain on the men's faces...."

Although Tuesdays were long days for Ralph R. and his drivers, Osgood was up just as early every day of the week. He was ready to open the doors of his store, any morning, after 5:30 a.m. Technically, the store did not open until 7:00 a.m., but Osgood was always out there by 6:15 a.m. In his mind, he had enough customers coming in at that hour to justify being open. He liked to socialize with the men before they left for the woods, and he enjoyed the leisurely pace of early morning hours in which he could do his daily dusting and sweeping. By the time the rest of the valley was awake, Osgood was ready for them. When his clerks arrived he had half of the work done, but that was the way he liked it.

Osgood was definitely at home behind the counter of his general store. He had very little formal education but as one of his neighbours said, "he had a business sense about him."⁸⁹ He had his own definition of education and as he told his grandchildren, years later:

I learned all I had to by listening to the old people in my father's store. I'd sit on a keg of nails and just listen.⁹⁰

Osgood learned how to run a store the old way, by observing his father. His department was the check-out counter. He took his station there early in the morning and only left when his clerks needed help, when it was mealtime or time for a nap. Everyone who entered Osgood's store was greeted with a smile and some conversation. Although there were times when he got caught up in the rush of the business world, he seldom hurried people in or out of his store. In fact, some people came to the store to socialize with Osgood, not to shop. Osgood enjoyed conversation and he excelled at the art of historical narration. He was popular with both young and old, and met everyone with an open mind. As was noted by one of his customers, "he treated the rich the same as the poor,

he was the same with everybody."⁹¹ Everybody liked to deal with Osgood. Harold, one of the clerks, remembered:

Everybody seemed to like Os. [Osgood] He had a smile... well, he was just a man for what he was. He knew when to smile and when not to smile. The store just seemed to be his bag of tricks. Some people can fill the job and some can't.⁹²

His generosity toward the community is illustrated by his liberal credit practices. He gave everyone who asked a first chance at credit:

Your grandfather had a different way about him. I remember one time this fellow came in here and he was from Mabou. I never saw him and your grandfather never saw him before. He asked your grandfather if he could get a chain and a bar for his power saw until next week. And your grandfather didn't know him. And, by gosh, your grandfather gave it to him and boy! next week he was in and paid for it. You know, that was your grandfather. He had a different way about him.⁹³

Complete strangers were trusted with credit purchases because Osgood believed that everyone deserved an opportunity to prove himself. His model for such generosity was his father, Ralph E. As Osgood's sister said:

When Dad [Ralph E.] died an awful lot of people owed him money. Os [Osgood] could have collected it and been a rich man, but

he wouldn't go after the money."

Not only did Osgood exercise liberal credit practices, but he also ran his store very much like a small bank. He would loan money, hold money until needed and always kept a float of \$2,000.00 on hand to cash cheques. Osgood saw these as services a merchant should be glad to provide for his customers. He never viewed himself as being taken advantage of. The only time he felt infringed upon by his clientele was when he would have to open the store after hours, or on Sunday.

The hours of operation at MacPherson's Lucky Dollar store were 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Monday through Saturday, and closed on Sunday. As was previously noted, Osgood usually was in his shop before seven in the morning, but he liked to be in bed by ten o'clock. Opening the store after hours was not a favourite chore. Osgood and Ralph R. often had to go out to the store after hours as people came knocking at the kitchen door. They usually requested gasoline, milk, bread or repaired chainsaws. Seldom does a rural merchant have a relaxing evening. His duties do not end when the door of the store is

locked. Before he can rest, he must total up the daily earnings, 'make up' the cash for the next day,⁹⁵ and bring the ledgers up to date. If all of these preparations are interrupted by people requesting forgotten items at the store, it can make for a very long day.

D. The Recent Years, 1978-1985

In 1978, Osgood decided it was time to expand his store. He was beginning to feel the pinch of competition from the Co-Operative Store at Margaree Forks.⁹⁶ He thought that by making his store larger, he would be able to stock more items with less clutter and maybe he could be some competition to the Co-Op. He also added more shopping carts for customer convenience, thinking this would encourage business. The expansion of 1978 entailed knocking out the right wall of the original building and encompassing the 1962 canteen addition as part of the main store. Whereas there had been three aisles in the store, there were now four, and many more shelves along the new right wall.

The biggest advantage of this extension was that it made the cash area of the store less congested. There were fewer shelves on the wall behind the check-out counter. The general medicines were moved from the age-old position behind the right-hand counter to several shelves in the new section. The items remaining behind the counter on the shelves and stapled to the wall included cigarettes, tobacco, spark plugs, power saw files, newspapers, batteries, pens, pencils, shoelaces, alarm clocks, razor blades, Bromoseltzer, balloons, nail clippers, films, maps of Cape Breton and Nova Scotia, cigarette papers, watch straps, combs, flies for fishing, safety pins, needles and thread. The functional articles in the space included two cash registers, one electric and one manual (so that even during the frequent power shortages in Margaree Valley business could be carried on); provincial sales tax lists; two intercom systems running between the store and the machine shop, and between the store and MacPherson's house; a telephone; Osgood's stool; a radio; credit card machine; paper bags of various sizes; and calendars with "MacPherson's Lucky Dollar" printed on them. These

calendars were given out to customers at the start of every new year. Stapled to the wall, high above the shelves, behind the cash area, were the licences common to every business establishment of this sort: a gasoline licence, ammunition licence and a health services vendor's permit. All of the licences issued from 1971 to 1978 were in evidence.

The new section was soon filled and looked very much as if it had always been there. In a random order, starting at the front of the extension and working towards the back of the store, the shelves contained a spice section, over-the-counter medicines such as aspirin, cough syrup, antihistamines and band-aids, assorted toiletries (namely toothpaste, toothbrushes, shaving lotion, mouth wash, shampoo and conditioners and deodorant), disposable diapers, baby food, pasta, school and stationery supplies, cookware, disposable cups and plates, and, stacked in the back corner, safety clothing required for the forest workers.

Aisle number four in the addition consisted of two frozen food freezers on one side, and display stands for bakery goods on the other. The aisle

adjacent to this one contained candy and confections at the front of the store, an ice cream freezer, cereals, ready-mixes, flour, cookies and paper products at the back of the store. The other aisles contained canned goods, soaps, fresh fruit and vegetables. At the back of the store, in the left hand corner was the meat counter and walk-in cooler, to be opened by staff only. This department also stocked eggs, dairy products and fresh vegetables. In the center of the back wall is a narrow walkway that leads to the no-longer used merchant's office, and to the 'out-back' storage, which is the former theatre area. Built high over the narrow walkway is a shelf holding many sizes of black rubber boots and heavy-duty work boots. In the right rear corner of the store is the exit leading to the driveway beside Osgood's home. Although the customers that continued to patronize the store appreciated the changes, and told him so, these changes did not make any substantial difference in the volume of business carried out.

The expansion in 1978 was the first structural change that MacPherson's store had seen since 1962.

ILLUS. 6. MacPherson's Store, 1976



when the ~~canteen~~ was built. In fact, with the exception of this addition, the changes made to the exterior of the store have been few. The exterior is now solid white instead of white with black trim, the iron railings which once protected the front windows have been removed, a white fiberglass canopy now shades the front of the store, the parking lot is paved, and there is an air compressor and two gas tanks, instead of one at the front right corner of the store.

As Osgood got older, he allowed more and more of the responsibility for his store to settle on his son's shoulders. Ralph R. changed the hours of operation. MacPherson's is now open from 7:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday. On Thursday and Friday the hours are 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. The store continues to be closed on Sunday. Ralph has also capitalized on the central location of the store by offering a wide spectrum of services; the store is a depot for a local dry-cleaning service, supplies a bulletin board for free community advertising, offers free delivery of groceries (sometimes even transporting the customers

themselves), continues to run the two-cycle machine shop, sells a propane installation and delivery service for a Sydney-based company, stocks two very popular local newspapers, the Oran and the Reporter,⁹⁷ in addition to the Sydney Post and the Halifax Chronicle Herald, and is the depot for a passenger and freight busline that travels between Cheticamp and Sydney five days a week. Ralph R. learned from his father that in order to survive, a rural merchant has to take risks and not be afraid of change. When asked about the wide range of services he offers, Ralph R. replied:

Competition forces you into new lines, new products come into the area and either you take it, or someone else does.⁹⁸

Unlike his grandfather, Ralph R. recognizes and responds to the powerful forces of competition.

In 1972, Sherry, Osgood's daughter, returned to Margaree Valley from Halifax and she began to take over many of the front counter duties. Having someone else to stand at the cash and pack boxes freed Osgood to sit on his stool near the telephone and entertain. From this position, he could oversee the whole shop and remain in a prime conversation zone.

ILLUS. 7. Osgood MacPherson



In 1980, Osgood's health no longer enabled him to spend the whole day in his store. However, he was not happy unless he had a couple of visits to the store every day. He would usually visit just before lunch, and again later in the afternoon. His friends soon caught on to this pattern and scheduled their arrivals to coincide with his. In this way, the social patterns of previous years were preserved.

Early in 1982, Osgood had to enter the hospital. This took him far away from his store and his home. The community missed Osgood. Every day people either called or dropped in at the Lucky Dollar in order to hear the latest report on his health. With the family and business figurehead absent from the premises, the remaining MacPhersons were called upon to pitch in and help. At this time, the author was doing fieldwork in Margaree Valley and suddenly found herself behind the check-out counter in her grandfather's store. It was a time of change for all concerned.

On March 1, 1982, Osgood MacPherson passed away. He was buried on Thursday, March 4, and his store was closed all day. Both the social and business community were shocked at his sudden passing. The last old-time

merchant in the Valley was gone.

For a few weeks after Osgood's death, the store had a gloomy atmosphere about it. Customers and friends continued to talk about him and comment upon his absence as they too adjusted to the loss. Some days his friends would gather in the store and reminisce about the days of telling stories with Osgood. The travelling salesmen also missed his presence, as they would be used to collecting stories and jokes along their route to 'tell to Osgood' when they got to Margaree. It was a sad time. However, people adapted to the change and the remaining staff at the Lucky Dollar continued to carry out business. There was never any question that the store would close after Osgood's death, it simply became Ralph R.'s store.

MacPherson's store is now the responsibility of Ralph R. and his wife, Lena. It opens at the not-quite-so-early hour of 7:00 a.m. Ralph and Lena stay in the store until the clerks arrive. Although not always present in the store, one or the other of them (Ralph or Lena) is on call all day to fill in when necessary.

The atmosphere in the store today is different from the days when Ralph E. and Osgood were in charge. No longer does the merchant stand behind the counter waiting to serve the people who walk through the door. Although Ralph R. has inherited the store from his father, and has in fact become the resident merchant, it does not hold the same attraction for him. He is much more involved in other business ventures that keep him constantly travelling.

Since Ralph R. has become merchant the three clerks have had to learn to be much more independent. Ralph's interaction with them is much more in line with being a manager than an employer. He expects the clerks to run the store without him, answering to his wife Lena in his absence, and bringing to his attention only business matters that are out of the ordinary. Ralph has even delegated such duties as ordering all the supplies to the three store clerks. The major difference between Ralph R.'s approach and Osgood's is, as one customer said:

Well, with your father... he has so many other businesses, and your grandfather only had the store. The store was his life."

Customers also notice the changes in the store

since Ralph inherited it. With Osgood gone, they look to Ralph to make them feel comfortable as shoppers. They love to receive Ralph's attention when he is in the store. Community members recognize Ralph as a busy man, and, therefore, his attention to individual clients imparts a sense of importance to their business transactions with him. While in the store Ralph makes time to talk to his customers. His manner is never rushed. His wife stressed this personality trait:

...manner is pretty important. I've often heard Dad [Ralph R.] say, 'the customer is always right.' Dad [Ralph R.] is good at working with people. It seems to run in them [MacPhersons]. I know some times they [the customers] really bug him n'yet he'd never show it.¹⁰⁰

Ralph is attentive to his patrons and listens closely when they speak to him. He is, however, very careful about what he says. He has the ability of knowing when to talk and of appropriate things to converse about. His speech, to everyone, is measured. Ralph R. is not an old time merchant. He does however recognize that MacPherson's is an institution in Margaree Valley, one that people depend upon and one that he will try to preserve. Robert, a clerk at

MacPherson's, accurately expressed the community sentiment about Ralph R. as the new merchant:

No one can ever replace your grandfather. Well, he was always in the store. He loved to talk and he was a good talker. He was good at dealing with the public. He knew all the old people, the young people, and the strangers within minutes of meeting them.

As for your father, well...I think it's too soon to tell.¹⁰¹

NOTES: CHAPTER IV

¹ Cape Breton is an island on the east coast of Canada. It juts out into the Atlantic Ocean from the northeast end of Nova Scotia.

² John F. Hart, History of Northeast Margaree (n.p.: n.p., 1963), p.8.

³ Hart, p. 7.

⁴ Hart, p. 7.

⁵ Public Archives of Nova Scotia., Place-Names and Places of Nova Scotia. (Mika Publishing: Ontario, 1976), p. 412.

⁶ Place-Names and Places of Nova Scotia, p. 412.

⁷ Hart, p. 8.

⁸ Hart, p. 43. This was the Margaree Congregational Church, now the Wilson United Church, Margaree Centre.

⁹ Hart, p. 19. The merchant was Benjamin Etter. Hart says Etter taught school but does not provide the

date, only mentioning that Etter died in 1937.

¹⁰ The details surrounding acquisition of this land are vague. There are three accounts: the one previously described from the oral history told by generations of MacPhersons; one by Donald MacPherson's grandson, G.W. MacPherson, "A free grant of five hundred acres was allotted to my grandfather by the Crown...", in A Parson's Adventure (Yonkers Book Co.: New York, 1925), p. 25; and a third version by Clara Dennis, Cape Breton Over (Ryerson Press: Toronto, 1942), p. 249, which states, "The purchase price was my grandfather's plaid overcoat, which the settler coveted as soon as he saw it."

¹¹ G.W. MacPherson, p. 25.

¹² Hart, p. 111.

¹³ Information gathered from conversations with Viola MacPherson and Osgood MacPherson, children of Ralph E., 1981.

¹⁴ G.W. MacPherson, p. 65. This entire story has been part of the oral tradition of the MacPherson family with the greatest storyteller being Ralph E.'s son, Osgood. My father, Ralph E.'s grandson, told me the same story on April 18, 1984, while reading a

draft of this thesis.

¹⁵ Osgood MacPherson, 27 June 1981.

¹⁶ Osgood MacPherson, 16 January 1982.

¹⁷ Osgood MacPherson, 27 June 1981.

¹⁸ Osgood MacPherson, 16 January 1982.

¹⁹ This lettering still appears on the window of MacPherson's store in Margaree Valley.

²⁰ Ralph R. MacPherson, 23 February 1982.

²¹ Viola MacPherson, 15 March 1981.

²² The pen nibs were from the R. Estabrook and Co. assortment and included such styles as judge's quill, oval point, professional, falcon and relief.

²³ These casket adornments probably came from the Catalogue of Funeral Supplies distributed by the Montague Furnishing Co. Ltd., Montague, Prince Edward Island. Several of these catalogues were found upstairs in the store.

²⁴ Viola MacPherson, 5 October 1982. Ralph E.'s daughter Viola was able to recall the candy counter vividly.

²⁵ Summer complaint would be referred to today as influenza.

²⁶ This information came from the side of a jar

of 'Pompeian Night Cream' found in the store. The slogan on the bottle says, "Brings Beauty While You Sleep. Will Not Grow Hair."

²⁷ These paper holders were made by E.B. Eddy Company, no patent date was visible. Rolls of brown paper came in two sizes, fifteen inch and thirty-two inch. So the paper holders were made accordingly. One of the above-mentioned paper holders was a double one with room for both a fifteen and a thirty-two inch roll. These holders are still used in the store today.

²⁸ Ralph R. MacPherson, 29 February 1984.

²⁹ The pump used in the molasses puncheon is still in MacPherson's store. It was patented on January 18, 1898, No. 197, by the Enterprise Mfg. Co., Philadelphia, U.S.A. This company called it an 'Enterprise Self Priming and Measuring Pump' and the measure was the British Imperial Gallon.

³⁰ Ralph R. MacPherson, 24 February 1982.

³¹ Nails were referred to by cost: a 2 1/2" nail was an 8-penny nail, and a 3" nail was a 10-penny nail.

³² Ledgers from the forge and general store of

Ralph E. MacPherson are still in existence and cover the years 1879-1910.

³³ Osgood MacPherson, 23 January 1982.

³⁴ Osgood MacPherson, 23 January 1982.

³⁵ Viola MacPherson, 29 December 1981.

³⁶ This sign was described in detail by Ralph E.'s grandson, Ralph R. MacPherson. "Tick" was another term which meant credit.

³⁷ The line had been left blank so that an appropriate date could be inserted.

³⁸ Cr. is an abbreviation for credit.

³⁹ Rem. is an abbreviation for removed.

⁴⁰ Viola MacPherson, 29 December 1981.

⁴¹ Ralph R. MacPherson, 23 February 1982.

⁴² Viola MacPherson, 23 March 1982 and 5 October 1982. The Post Office was placed in MacPherson's store in 1930.

⁴³ This would be common practice at any home in the area at the time.

⁴⁴ Recorded 30 March 1982. Big Intervale is eight miles from Margaree Valley.

⁴⁵ Recorded 30 March 1982. The informant is the daughter of a onetime merchant in Margaree

Valley.

⁴⁶ Recorded June 1981. The informant is the daughter a onetime merchant in N.E. Margaree.

⁴⁷ Gerald Carson, The Old Country Store. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 81.

⁴⁸ Osgood MacPherson, 23 January 1982.

⁴⁹ Recorded June 1981.

⁵⁰ Recorded 30 March 1982.

⁵¹ Examples of this can be seen with Roger Burton and James Smith as previously mentioned.

⁵² Another local merchant with a style similar to Ralph E.'s was Arthur Ingraham. Examples of his sense of humour are found elsewhere in this thesis.

⁵³ Recorded on March 1, 1982 in the store. People from Margaree Valley see this as a very funny story. The humour is found in the fact that Ralph E. had been receiving and lending money during all his years as a businessman, and not many young men ever bothered to get dressed up before taking advantage of his services.

⁵⁴ In 1935, Ralph E. had one of the first wireless radio sets in the Valley.

⁵⁵ Will forms can still be purchased at

MacPherson's store.

⁵⁶ Viola MacPherson, 22 February 1982.

⁵⁷ Viola MacPherson, 29 December 1981.

⁵⁸ Viola MacPherson, 23 March 1982.

⁵⁹ Viola MacPherson, 23 March 1982.

⁶⁰ Lena MacPherson, 22 January 1982.

⁶¹ Ralph E. died in 1942 at the age of 87 years.

⁶² Ralph E. and Matilda had nine children.

⁶³ Osgood MacPherson, 21 January 1982. The Post Office was put in the store in 1930. Ralph E. was paid \$18.00 a year for this service.

⁶⁴ Osgood MacPherson, 27 June 1981. The lake referred to is one of the three known locally as Lakes O'Law.

⁶⁵ Osgood married Anne B. MacKenzie.

⁶⁶ Ralph R. MacPherson, 23 March 1984.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 23 March 1984.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 23 March 1984.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 23 March 1984.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 23 March 1984.

⁷¹ Ibid., 23 March 1984. Inverness is 32 miles from Margaree Valley.

⁷² Ralph R. MacPherson, 23 March 1984.

73 The Normaway Inn, Egypt Road, Margaree Valley.

This Inn is on the site of the original MacPherson homestead. It passed out of the family in 1940 but is still in operation.

74 Ralph R. MacPherson, 23 March 1984.

75 Ralph R. MacPherson, 23 March 1984.

76 Ralph R. MacPherson, 23 March 1984.

77 The war referred to is World War II,

1939-1945.

78 Osgood MacPherson, 30 June 1981.

79 Ralph R. MacPherson, 23 March 1984.

80 Osgood MacPherson, 30 June 1981.

81 Ralph R. MacPherson, 23 March 1984.

82 Osgood's store became known as 'The Lucky Dollar' and is still called that by many of the local people. Technically, it stopped being a Lucky Dollar Store in 1981 when L.H. Chernin, the wholesaler, went into receivership.

83 L.H. Chernin & Sons, Glace Bay, Nova Scotia.

84 Ralph R. married Lena M. Fraser in 1955.

85 Nova Scotia Forest Industries is known as N.S.F.I.

86 The local Co-Op Store located in Margaree

Forks, a distance of six miles from MacPherson's store in Margaree Valley, was its nearest competitor.

87 Glace Bay is on the east coast of Cape Breton Island, one hundred and ten miles from Margaree Valley.

88 Darlene MacPherson, 16 February 1982.

89 Recorded January 1981.

90 Osgood MacPherson, January 1981.

91 Recorded 23 March 1982.

92 Harold MacDougall, 12 March 1982.

93 Harold MacDougall, 12 March 1982.

94 Viola MacPherson, 25 February 1982.

95 A float of \$90.00 was in the cash register to start off each morning.

96 A new, modern store was built in 1976 to replace the old-fashioned Co-Op Store in Margaree Forks.

97 The Reporter is printed in Port Hawkesbury, Nova Scotia and The Oran is printed in Inverness, Nova Scotia.

98 Ralph R. MacPherson, January 1983.

99 Recorded March 23, 1982.

100 Lena MacPherson, January 22, 1982.

101 Robert Hart, March 23, 1983.

ILLUS. 8. MacPherson's Store, 1985



CHAPTER V - SOCIAL INTERACTION: THE CONTEXT

The historical information presented in the preceding chapter describes the evolution of MacPherson's General Store as a centre for social interaction in Margaree Valley. Since the time it first opened in 1909, the store has become the most popular gathering place in the community and, as a direct result, a focal point in the oral history and communication patterns of the inhabitants. The inhabitants of Margaree Valley are naturally sociable and outgoing. They are proud of their reputation as friendly and considerate people. They show their gregariousness by waving to every car and person met on the road, blowing horns as a form of greeting when passing the homes of friends, stopping to offer a ride to anyone walking on the road, and greeting everyone with "Hello, and how are you today?." It is understandable that people have chosen a location

outside their homes as a meeting place to talk to their neighbours in light of the scarcity of work settings for ongoing social interaction, the sociable nature of these people, and the relatively small population of Margaree.

MacPherson's General Store has become a centre of communication and social interaction for the adults of Margaree Valley for several reasons. Its closest rivals, the three churches and the local school, offer only occasional activities for adults, and the only other store in the community, Crawford's, is a small convenience store. MacPherson's General Store is open six days a week for a minimum of twelve hours a day.

The store offers a comfortable environment and a welcoming atmosphere that has been carefully nurtured by the merchants of the MacPherson family. The store offers a sense of permanence and continuity to the activities and history of Margaree Valley; this permanence and continuity can be attributed mainly to MacPherson's store always being a family business. Everyone in the Valley is familiar with the merchant, the staff and even the very layout of the store.

People feel comfortable at MacPherson's general

store and because of this, predictable patterns of behaviour emerge. Specifically, inhabitants of the Valley can (albeit, unconsciously) predict what will happen at the store on any given day and know that it is their best source of information concerning local events and people. An interesting parallel is that the merchants and staff can also predict who will come to the store at particular times as well as their reasons for coming to the store.

This chapter will examine some of the aspects of MacPherson's General Store which have contributed to its continuity as a centre for social interaction, namely, the schedule and routine of the store and the needs and characteristics of the people who come to the store. In effect, I will describe the context for talk and narrative as it is found in MacPherson's General Store in its recent years (1978-1985). This sets the stage for the next chapter which focuses on the content of the talk undertaken in the store.

A. Daily Activities

A typical day in MacPherson's general store begins

at 7:00 a.m., if not earlier. Usually before Ralph R. gets the door unlocked, there are a couple of vehicles parked in front of the store with people waiting to enter the store. This is a ritual that has been performed many times. The valley is quiet this early in the morning, but the bread truck driver¹ and those on their way to work are eager for a little conversation before the workday technically begins. They meet at 'the store' ostensibly to buy a package of cigarettes or gum, but their true interest is to find out if anything new happened during the night, and what is supposed to happen that day. These few minutes of conversation will provide food for thought during the long day on the road or in the woods.

Shortly after this first little rush subsides, another group of people begin drifting into the store. Such customers include the man who likes to shop when there are no others in the store, the fellow who likes to be first with the daily news, and the man who always has a bottle of pop and a bit of conversation before opening his shop a few houses away. Since this second group is more leisurely in manner, Ralph or Lena have time to sweep, dust, and empty garbage cans

while still attending to the customers. They have inherited Osgood's policy of having this work done before the clerks even arrive on the scene at 8:00 a.m.²

The first clerk to arrive is Sherry, Osgood's daughter. Sherry's position, cashier, is probably one of the most envied positions in the store because, from the check-out, she can see and speak to everyone that enters or leaves the store. As the customers come into the store they expect to exchange greetings with the person behind the counter. If this exchange does not take place as they enter, they will certainly make time for a chat before departing. While it may be coveted for its location, the check-out is also the busiest area in the store. There are times, especially after a busy day, when making small talk about the weather or news becomes extremely tedious. Usually this position is serviced only by Sherry, but when things get too hectic she calls on one of the other clerks to pack and carry out boxes. For example, when the bus arrives from Sydney in the evening³ and people are waiting to meet passengers, pick up packages or their daily paper, it takes two

ILLUS. 9. Sherry MacPherson, 1985



people to keep the traffic at the front counter running smoothly.

In addition to operating the cash register and making small talk with the customers, Sherry is responsible for stocking the shelves behind the counter which contain tobacco and cigarettes, filling the chocolate bar and chewing gum display racks, answering the telephone and taking messages, filling grocery orders that are telephoned into the store, answering the intercom that is connected to the merchant's house, keeping an eye on the gas tanks to make sure people are being served and/or are not trying to steal gas and, more than occasionally, serving gas.

It is necessary for the person at the cash to pay close attention to the activity around the two gas tanks. Although stealing gasoline may not be a common practice, it is certainly one that happens at MacPherson's. Certain people will fill their gas tanks or five-gallon cans, then hit the handle of the pump which clears the figures. They will then come into the store and pay for a much lesser amount of gas than they actually took. It was a while before anyone

in the store caught on to this method of shoplifting but once Ralph R. became aware of it, he instructed Robert or Harold, the other clerks, to serve gas. Prior to this, people in Margaree always served their own gasoline. If the clerks cannot serve the gas because it is too busy in the store, Sherry watches the tanks out of the corner of her eye while standing at the check-out.

Harold MacDougall is the second clerk to arrive. He is unquestionably the most outgoing of the clerks. After working with him, it was not difficult to pick out the key to his success with the public: he flatters the ladies, teases the children and always has a story for the men, be it good or bad. To Harold, satisfying a customer means more than just filling their shopping requirements. It means taking time to chat, to offer advice and dinner suggestions, or to listen when the individual merely wishes to talk. Some of the more 'particular' customers ask for Mr. MacDougall specifically as he caters to their every need.

Harold's official position at MacPherson's is that of meat-cutter. His section of the store is

found in the back left corner. This is a very busy section of the shop because Harold's friends gather there to visit even when not ordering meat. In addition to the meat cutting, Harold is responsible for the display case presentation and for ordering supplies. Second to this, he is in charge of the dairy products and the frozen foods. It is up to him to make sure that the showcases are full, neat, and clean. Harold also stocks shelves in the main floor.

Robert Hart, the third clerk, has been on staff the longest. Robert can lend a hand in any aspect of running a general store. He began working for MacPherson's as a teenager, packing and carrying boxes, serving gas, sweeping floors and stocking shelves. Eventually he graduated to meat cutting which he did for several years. Although he continues to help in all of these jobs, Robert's principal duties in the store today are ordering for the main store, assembling the individual grocery orders from the clerks and telephoning these orders to the wholesale outlets in Sydney. Robert also drives MacPherson's truck to Sydney every Tuesday morning to pick up the weekly supply order for the store and he

is responsible for the orders concerning MacPherson's propane business in Margaree. He is often called upon to deliver and hook up tanks of propane for homes throughout the entire Margaree Valley.

When Harold was employed, Robert began to learn and eventually take over other responsibilities at MacPherson's. Three clerks are not usually needed in the store at the same time, and Robert divides his time between the main store and the small engine repair shop 'out-back.' Most days, and certainly in fine weather, Robert is kept very busy in this small shop. Here, he repairs and sells power saws and lawn mowers. Robert seems to enjoy the privilege of leaving the store and working in the shop on mechanical problems. Often, the men who bring their saws to be repaired will stay and talk. Robert enjoys this type of social interaction. He is not as gregarious as Harold and therefore seems to work better with men, leaving the ladies and more particular gentlemen customers to Harold.

These work distinctions for the clerks were drawn up by the individuals themselves and seem to work well. Although each of the clerks has particular

duties and routines that he follows, they are all willing to help out in any other area. MacPherson's store is still very much a family business and courtesy and consideration for one another is a major requirement in order to ensure that all runs smoothly. This is a small business in a rural area and all of the employees are from the same community. It is necessary that all employees get along well together or the entire business will feel the effects.

As the clerks arrive in the morning, they take time to catch up on the morning news. It is necessary that they all be informed of the community events since they will be called upon to discuss these happenings all day long with eagerly attentive customers. Once the clerks have been 'briefed' on the news, they start work. It is interesting to note the differences between the methods with which the three clerks reveal their knowledge of 'Valley news' and to whom they disclose this information.

Sherry, as the first clerk to arrive in the morning, tells Robert and Harold of the local events since closing time the night before. Sherry enjoys this privilege which once belonged to her father,

Osgood. Although she is also the first person the clients greet as they enter the store, she is not the one to whom they go to gather neighbourhood reports. Sherry does not have the ability to set people at ease and make them comfortable, thus only people that know her very well seek her out as a news bearer. Although Sherry may have the most 'original' version of any local news that will be discussed in the store, most people either already know the news or first discuss it with Harold.

Robert, the senior clerk, conducts his story-telling in the machine shop and not in the store. Robert has a very abrupt manner that does not make him a favourite with all local people when it comes to imparting community bulletins. The responsibility for ordering the groceries rests on Robert's shoulders, and he enjoys the interaction with the salesmen, communicating with them in a friendlier manner than he does with the local people. He even tells the sales people news from Margaree Valley. The difference between customers and sales people is that the customers expect to be waited on and often do not treat clerks as their equals. Robert enjoys being

treated as someone of importance in the business, and he gets this recognition from his salesman friends. Whereas Sherry and Harold receive social gratification within the store, Robert has to look elsewhere for it. When he does interact with customers he is very selective about to whom and in what manner he divulges local information. He has acquired this method of interaction by observing Ralph R., but his manner of selectivity usually offends people rather than encouraging them to look on him as a friend.

Harold is also selective about sharing news. He only releases the 'good stuff' to people he figures will really appreciate it. Otherwise he makes very general conversation. Throughout the day, Harold will divulge his share of community gossip to "special" customers who seek him out down at the meat counter. The location of the meat counter lends an air of secrecy to the conversations that are conducted there. The hushed atmosphere delights both the talker and the listeners, but aggravates the other clerks. This sense of customer one-up-manship began after Osgood's death, when the merchant's role was no longer filled. Each of the clerks wanted the status that was once

given to Osgood. Sherry thought that she deserved it because she was his daughter; Robert assumed likewise because he had seniority and Harold recognized that, of the three clerks, he interacted most favourably with the patrons. Although the clerks tend to be testy when it comes to 'being the first to tell the news,' they have managed to work well together.

Even if the atmosphere between clerks is uncomfortable because someone is having a bad day, they all get together in the afternoon and have a tea-break. The break occurs when there is a lull in customer activity. Sherry runs to the house, prepares the tea and assembles a snack for the 'boys.' When everything is ready, she carries it out to the store where the clerks stand and share it. This tea-break has become such a routine that now, even if Sherry is not at home, a female member of the family makes tea for the 'boys' in the store.

The activities for each day of the week provide a specific routine for the clerks. Monday is considered to be a slow day in terms of the number of customers in the store. Consequently, it is an ideal day to replenish the shelves and tidy the store after the

weekend rush. There are only two busy times during the day: mealtimes (12:00 noon and 5:00 p.m.) and paper time (4:00 to 5:00 p.m.)

Tuesday is a very structured day. The morning will be slow with few coming in to shop. Both clerks stand around anticipating the work they will have when the weekly grocery supplies arrive from Sydney via Robert and the MacPherson's truck. When the truck arrives, all of the clerks and even some regular loungers at the store pitch in and help unload. Once the truck is unloaded the first supplies to be put on shelves are the weekly specials. The 'special shelves' are found at the very front of the store at the end of the first aisle and to the left of the front door. They are four semi-circular shelves of narrowing degrees and heights, the largest being on the bottom. This bottom shelf usually holds soap, detergents, bleach and larger canned goods. The second, third, and fourth shelves hold everything from canned meats to razor blades, depending on the features of the week. If all of the items featured in the newspaper are not available, Robert will make up 'in-store' specials to go on these shelves.

While the specials are being put on the shelves, Ralph or Robert is busy pricing. With invoices in hand, one or the other walks around the store marking the 'price per item' on each box. This gives the other clerks an opportunity to continue stamping goods and stocking shelves. Of course while all of this is happening, people are still coming into the store to shop, the telephone is ringing and normal store activities continue. Eventually all of the new supplies are in place and the surplus is stored out in the warehouse. The discarded boxes are stacked and stored and everyone relaxes. The next day will be an easier one.

Wednesday is considered an unpredictable day-- it may or may not be busy. The one definite rush will be when people come for their newspapers. If the day is a slow one, Robert usually goes to the machine shop to work on the backlog of power saws that need repairing. Harold stays in the store with Sherry. Both Robert and Harold manage to be in the store around 2:30 p.m. when Sherry runs next door to the house to make tea for them.

Thursday business is rushed from 9:00 a.m. until

closing at 9:00 p.m. This is the day when the weekly specials actually go on sale. Prior to this, they have only been on display. Thursday is the day of large grocery orders.

Friday morning is usually slow. Everyone knows that the store is open until 9:00 p.m. and that it is the start of the weekend. No one feels hurried. By late afternoon the pace picks up both with children, running in and out and people coming in for their supper supplies. The evening shopping pace is brisk but not rushed.

Saturday there is a bustling atmosphere in the store. This feeling is promoted by the clerks knowing that Sunday is a day off, and by the customers knowing that, on Sunday, MacPherson's will be closed. It is almost a guarantee that on Saturday evening, just before the closing hour of 7:30 p.m. there will be two or three large grocery orders. The clerks have come to expect this and they are no longer surprised if they cannot leave exactly on schedule.

Sunday is the only day of the week when the store is closed all day. Of course everyone in the Valley knows that as long as there is a car in the yard at

MacPherson's someone will go to the store for them.
Thus the store is never really closed.

The delivery of papers to the store requires elaboration, for not only is it part of the weekly routine of the store, it also contributes to an understanding of the importance of the store as a social centre in Margaree Valley. MacPherson's General Store receives four separate Nova Scotia newspapers: The Cape Breton Post, published in Sydney; The Chronicle Herald, published in Halifax; The Reporter, from Port Hawkesbury; and The Oran, published in Inverness. The Post is delivered daily to the store by a local bus service that operates five days a week during the summer and three days a week in the winter. Many residents of Margaree Valley order The Post through the store rather than subscribe through the mail because it arrives a day late through the mail. The store offers The Post on the day of publication throughout the summer but two editions per week are late in winter. This does not bother the subscribers who seem more interested in the weekly grocery specials, wedding announcements and obituaries for people from the Valley than in timely news

stories.

The Chronicle Herald is popular in Margaree Valley because it is delivered early in the morning. Delivery of The Herald is scheduled for 7:00 a.m. every morning but is half an hour later on Saturday. Once again, people can receive The Herald through home delivery but prefer to visit the store and pick up a copy. Most residents of the Valley subscribe to The Herald because it carries provincial news and provincial obituaries. Few people want to miss reading the obituary of a resident of the Valley picked up by the provincial paper or that of a former resident who moved to the mainland.

The Oran is delivered to MacPherson's store on Wednesday evening between 5:00 and 6:00 p.m. It lists local store advertisements, current events in the Inverness vicinity and hints of local scandals in the 'Dis and Dat' column. The Reporter is delivered shortly before The Oran on Wednesday and is known for its 'Police/Report' column which lists local crimes, subsequent fines and court appearances, and names the individuals involved. The Reporter is not as popular as The Oran with the exception of weeks when it is

known that a local resident will be named in the 'Police Report.'

Aside from the routine performance of store duties, some out of the ordinary event seems to occur each week. It may be a visit from someone who has not been to the store in a while, or an event that causes excitement in the Valley such as a fire or an accident. Events such as these provide a diversion from daily and weekly routines which can become monotonous. People are very predictable in Margaree Valley. Due to the size of the community, and the nature of the store the clerks can forecast which shoppers will be in and how busy they will be depending on the day of the week. Not everyone has a rigid schedule, but local people would be surprised at how much they are governed by routine. This rigidity becomes evident in the description of the types of people who come to the store, found in the last section of this chapter.

The description of the daily and weekly schedule of events in MacPherson's General Store provides part of the context in which talk and narrative take place. The work responsibilities and personalities of the

staff affect the nature of the interaction in the store, as does the layout of the store itself. I observed that particular types of interaction occurred in particular areas of the store. The frequency and predictability of this phenomenon demanded that attention be paid to the layout of the store and that a description of the layout be included in the discussion of social interaction in the store.

B. The Layout: Zones of Interaction

Between 1909 and 1959, social interaction in MacPherson's Store took place in the centre of the room. In 1959, the layout changed with the addition of shelves, freezers and display racks which created aisles similar to those in a modern supermarket. These structural changes eliminated the obvious place for socializing--around the pot-belly stove in the centre of the room. However, these changes did not lead to the demise of social interaction in the store. Instead, several small gathering spots became popular throughout the store. While social interaction has always been common in MacPherson's Store, regardless

of changes to the layout, and recognizable social patterns are evident in each time period, this discussion focuses on the current layout of the store.

The present layout of MacPherson's Store allows for pockets, or zones, where people meet and socialize. These pockets can be described physically in terms of their location within the store and how they function as a place of socialization. The zones have been identified according to the following criteria: location, kind of people who meet there, the type of information exchanged or socializing that occurs there, and the number of people involved in such interaction. There are eight recognizable social zones in MacPherson's Store: the potato zone, the special shelf zone, the pop cooler zone, the meat counter zone, the back door zone, the check-out zone, the gas tank zone, and the office zone.

Located to the left of the main entrance, and beside the bags of potatoes, the potato zone is probably the most popular area for socializing. From here, the check-out counter, the front door, the entire left side of the store, and the area outside the front of the store are clearly visible. This zone

is frequented exclusively by males of all ages. Many senior Margaree Valley men have grown so accustomed to the area that they would not think of standing anywhere else. The younger frequenters have learned the significance of such a vantage point from watching their elders. Both age groups feel comfortable in the potato zone but the seniors always have priority. Since the zone is so public, the information exchanged here is usually local community or general world news, conversations concerning employment or light-hearted reminiscing. The number of men who gather here to socialize is usually between two and five.

The special shelf zone is located at the very front of the store almost immediately in front of the entrance door. It is actually the end section of the shelving unit that comprises aisles one and two. When the special shelves are empty, they become a public leaning post. The unit is comprised of five shelves so that people of any height can find a shelf to lean on. Again, this is an exclusively male socializing zone, probably due to the fact that the person standing here generally interacts directly with the

merchant, a male. All conversation focused on from the special shelf zone is for public consumption. This 'leaning-post' social zone is only large enough to accommodate one individual at a time.

The pop cooler zone is located half way down the left wall of the store, beside the pop cooler. It is used for exchanging semi-private and personal information. Conversation in the pop cooler zone cannot be overheard but the participants are very visible to those in the potato zone so there is no sense of real privacy here. Both men and women socialize in the pop cooler zone although rarely with each other. The men meet there while actually purchasing pop and often pause to tell a joke or a story not considered appropriate for mixed company. The ladies are usually shopping from the nearby shelves but find time to stop here for a little chat with the staff or other shoppers.

The people who gather in the meat counter zone want their conversations to be very private and exclusive and the zone's location provides such an atmosphere. It is found at the very back of the store next to the meat display cases and facing up the

second aisle toward the front door. All of the verbal interaction that takes place there is conducted in low tones. Decreased volume adds to the air of intimacy surrounding the zone. Here the nitty-gritty, behind-the-scenes details of every story and news item are discussed. The people who frequent here are the meat-cutter and one to three other individuals.

The back door zone could also be called the 'Family Trap' since this is the area where members of the MacPhetson family get cornered by inquisitive female customers. All of the family members enter and leave the store through the back door which is opposite the merchant's house. Both customers and clerks know that they will be able to waylay one of the MacPhersons if they are in this zone. The talk that takes place here is of a semi-private nature. Usually the customers or clerks ask personal questions and the MacPhersons try to evade them. Such interaction is most often between two people.

The check-out counter zone is to the immediate right of anyone entering through the front door. All of the social interaction which takes place here is public. Topics discussed are general, including local

news, gossip, weather, health and church news. The major participants include the cashier plus two or three customers of either sex.

Located to the right of the main entrance, the gas tank zone is one of two socializing zones found outside the store. Here, the social interaction is between the clerk serving gas and the customer in the car, or the individual putting gas in his own car and the driver of the next vehicle in line at the pumps. All verbal exchanges made here are general. The volume of such conversations must be loud enough to be heard over the noise of the pumps and the road traffic. No one would attempt to have a private or personal discussion in the gas tank zone.

The office zone is the second socializing zone found outside the store. Although there is an office in the store, located at the back to the right of the meat counter it is no longer used, except as Harold's lunchroom in the winter time. The current office is found in the dining-room of the merchant's home, seventy-five feet to the right of the store and separated by a private driveway. Many people make use of this 'office'--customers, friends and salesmen.

The conversation which takes place here is private and may cover such topics as finance and business, or other confidential matters. In addition to Ralph R., the merchant, and his wife Lena, there may be as many as four others involved in social interaction in the office zone.

C, The Characters

One method of analyzing social interaction is through the identification and examination of established patterns. Patterns are formed in response to activities or events that are regularly repeated in the life of an individual or a community. There are many regularly repeated factors and daily routines relative to the setting of MacPherson's General Store. These have been examined in the preceding chapter and in the section on daily and weekly routines in the store and the conversation zones that have evolved within the current structure of the store. In addition to the patterns established or promoted by the store, there are daily routines in the community itself which interact with the routine of the store.

Daily routines in the community revolve around family groups characterized by a father who leaves for work early in the morning, a mother who is a full-time housewife and children who attend school from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. daily. A few variations occur as some women balance the responsibility of their homes with outside employment and some of the men are retired or seasonally unemployed. Meals in the Valley are subject to a schedule with most families having breakfast between 7:30 and 8:30 a.m., dinner at noon and supper at 5:00 p.m. Most of the families in Margaree Valley follow this pattern. The result is a high degree of homogeneity in the schedules of all residents of the community.

The existence of clearly identifiable patterns in the operation of the store and in the daily life of the community encourages individuals to develop personal patterns which suit their needs and personalities. The patterns are evident in the behaviours of the people who come to MacPherson's Store as demonstrated in the frequency of visits they make and the reasons for those visits. Through careful observation of the daily visitors to the

store, I was able to identify the patterns of the characters who come to the store. It is interesting that several distinct "types" of visitors or shoppers can be identified, and described in twenty patterns, distinguishable by their purpose in coming to the store, types of conversation in which they engage and the contribution they make to the continuity and predictability of daily life in MacPherson's Store. The patterns of the characters are described in the remainder of this chapter and are presented in a time sequence typical of an average day in the store.

When the store opens at 7:00 a.m. the first social interaction the merchant has is with the Breadman, the Butternut Bread delivery man. Every morning the Breadman drives from his home in Cheticamp⁴ to the Trans-Canada Highway⁵ where he meets a transport truck with fresh bread for his customers. The Breadman's route begins at MacPherson's Store and ends in Cheticamp with stops at every small store in between.

MacPherson's is the first stop on his route through the Valley because he knows that they will be open at 7:00 a.m. or before. If he arrives early, he

sits out front of the store until the doors are opened. When the store is open the Breadman goes in and removes the out-dated products from the shelves. The Breadman uses his own judgement as to the amount of bread products to put on the shelf and the merchant does not question him. Over the years, they have grown to trust each other. The only time that the merchant requests something different is when there is a special order from a customer. When the shelves are sufficiently stocked the Breadman approaches the counter, pulls out his billing book, and leans on the counter while writing up his receipt. Depending on whether or not he has any news, or stories to tell, this is the time when the Breadman will socialize with the merchant. The Breadman's entire routine takes twenty to twenty-five minutes before he is off to his next customer.

As he leaves, the Breadman always takes a moment to speak to the man he has met at the door of MacPherson's for the past twelve years, his friend the First Customer. This particular patron has been the first customer of the day in MacPherson's Store for the past twenty years. He prefers to shop early in

the morning before 'too many come around,' as he does not want to interact with other community residents. Over the years, he and the Breadman have become friends. They always exchange greetings in the doorway.

The First Customer does not stay in the store for long. After greeting the Breadman, he nods 'hello' to the merchant, then walks around and picks up his daily groceries. Once all his supplies are assembled in his arms, he proceeds to the counter to be checked out. As he pays, the First Customer may comment on the weather to the merchant but he limits his conversation to that. As the First Customer leaves at 7:20 a.m., the daily influx of Workmen arrive.

The Workmen arrive between 7:15 and 7:30 Monday to Friday and come either in individual cars or in company vans. When they come into the store, they are in a hurry. Most want to pick up extra gasoline or replacement parts for their chain saws, cigarettes and pop. In order to be on time for work with the local forestry service, they must leave the store at 7:30

a.m. For most of these men, it is a thirty minute drive to their work site.

The Workmen socialize while they are picking up their supplies and waiting in line to pay at the counter. Soon after they have paid for their goods they go out and into the waiting vehicles. If it is raining or snowing, however, the Workmen may stand around five or ten minutes longer in the heated comfort of the store. They depart at 7:30 or 7:40 a.m.

When the Workmen depart, the next influx of customers are the Retirees, the middle-aged and retired men who 'drop in' around 8:30 a.m. to see what is 'going on today' in the Valley. The Retirees often purchase some small item to justify their visit but they are really present to satisfy their curiosity, not out of necessity. Often these men will stay from thirty to sixty minutes in the store.

The lifestyles of the Retirees are very quiet. They do not have a lot to occupy their time so they come to the store looking for excitement. The pattern here is dependent upon who is in the store at the time when the Retirees visit. This is so important that it

can even determine when they actually go to the store. The length of time that the Retirees stay in the store is related to the other characters present and how interesting the conversation is. Often, the length of their stay depends on whether the merchant, clerks or other customers take time to talk to them.

The remainder of the morning is slow in comparison with the opening rush. Afternoons at MacPherson's Store see a steady stream of several types of shoppers and visitors to the store who drop in between specific times. The patterns evident include the housewives, the elderly, the "junkies", the "stackers" and the children.

Immediately after lunch, but before three o'clock, the Housewives come to shop. These women come to do their weekly shopping, thus they are lengthy visitors. There is no specific pattern to the route the Housewives take to shop--some follow their lists specifically while others simply roam up and down the aisles. With the exception of meat and heavy items, the Housewives usually conduct their business without much interaction with the store employees. When meat is being selected and ordered, the shopper

usually exchanges a few platitudes with the meat-cutter of the day. When a Housewife wants a twenty pound bag of flour or potatoes, she tells a male clerk who, when he is not busy, carries the item out to her car. The shopper simply tells the cashier about the item when her order is being totalled.

Although Housewives enjoy seeing their friends in the store they do not spend a lot of time talking to them or to the clerks. These women have a purpose-- to complete their shopping and return home before their children arrive from school. The amount of time that a Housewife spends in the store is determined by the exact time she arrived at the store. All of the women want to be home when their children get out of school, and early afternoon shoppers can stay at least an hour while those who come later must co-ordinate their store visit with the school bus arrival at three o'clock. Even Housewives with grown-up children seem to adhere to this schedule--habits are hard to break.

One group of shoppers who particularly appreciate the attention they receive at MacPherson's are the Elderly. Elderly people in Margaree Valley are

respected members of the community and they are treated as such when they visit MacPherson's Store. Sometimes these elderly are related to the clerks or to the MacPherson family but even if they are not, they are treated respectfully.

*Elderly people are not active customers in the store in the early morning, late in the evening, or at meal times. They like to shop at anytime in the early afternoon until just before the supper hour. They never have large grocery lists because they are only shopping for one or two people. The elderly people usually take about thirty minutes to complete their business in the store.

Elderly people know they are welcome at MacPherson's; not only will they be helped with their shopping, if they wish, but they also have the opportunity to socialize at a pace that suits them. They are often lonely people. Sometimes they come to the store just to see and talk to someone; they may or may not come to shop. Those that do shop at MacPherson's like to be waited on individually. Usually one clerk dedicates himself to a particular customer and makes sure that the customer is

satisfied.

The clerks cater to these people even if they do not shop at the store in person. In the winter, elderly people often telephone their grocery orders in to the store. The clerks must then fill the orders, package them and see that they are delivered. If orders are placed over the telephone, Sherry usually writes out the list. She takes pride in making sure that the lists are filled and that all items are acceptable to the purchaser. If an item is not available, she will choose a substitute or telephone the customer to learn of their preference. Robert and Harold work more with the customers who do come to the store to shop. They take active roles in helping customers in the store to find items, lift heavy packages. They also open doors, assist people down the steps, and carry boxes.

Although they are interested in community news and want to hear about it, the elderly visitors to the store no longer plan to stay and visit after their shopping is completed. These people were once good friends with Osgood and they miss the camaraderie they had with him. The change in the social habits of the

elderly shoppers at MacPherson's store is because they no longer have a comrade and peer sitting behind the counter.

Junkies are similar customers to the Retirees in that they are not required to operate their lives on a time schedule because they are unemployed. Typically they drop into the store mid-afternoon for 'a pack of smokes' or a pop. Often they will stand back from the check-out and drink their pop or have a cigarette while they observe what is going on in the store. Although their purpose in coming to the store is to purchase what they are craving, they also hope to acquire some news. The length of their stay is determined by the presence of other customers.

While the Junkie pattern is similar to that of the Retiree in that they both purchase a single item or a small order, the reasons behind the visits are different. The Retiree comes to the store to kill time and he buys some item to justify the visit. The Junkie comes to the store to satisfy a craving and leaves with a bit of news as a bonus. The Junkie usually spends less time in the store than the Retiree but leaves with the same amount of news. The Retiree

stays around to discuss the news but the Junkie does not.

The Stacker is a male customer, known thus because he is not inclined to use the available shopping carts and baskets found in MacPherson's Store. The most noticeable characteristic of the Stacker is that he is not in a hurry. He will arrive at the store in the mid-afternoon (occasionally in the early evening) and takes full advantage of his time in the store to scrutinize everything. This individual will walk around the store selecting grocery items one at a time and stack them on the check-out counter or some other available shelf space at the front of the store. The two most common 'stacking' spaces used are the 'special shelf' and the newspaper table.

The pattern used for assembling these groceries is determined by who is present in the store and willing to talk to the Stacker. If Harbld is not too busy the Stacker may stroll down to the meat counter for a chat; he does not feel obliged to purchase meat. While standing at the meat counter the Stacker always positions himself so that he has a clear view up the centre aisle to the front of the store. This position

is important to him. If the front door opens while he is at the back of the store, he wants to know who is entering or leaving. If the entering individual is of interest to the Stacker, he will end his conversation with Harold and saunter to the front. If he has selected any meat or dairy products while talking to Harold, he will take these items to the front of the store and add them to his assembled pile of goods. Then the Stacker will join or initiate a conversation at the front of the store. Harold may come forward at this point and join this group. This conversation takes place in one of the conversation zones near the check-out counter.

This pattern of collecting groceries and depositing them in a pre-determined spot interspersed with social interaction, may be repeated several times. For the Stacker, the 'stack' of goods is the focal point in the store. Each trip that he takes around the store radiates from the stack to a product he wishes to pick-up or to another customer he wishes to talk to. His selection of goods is often based on where the most interesting talking is taking place and where other customers, with whom he chooses to

interact, are situated.

When the Stacker is getting ready to terminate his visit he begins leisurely moving his selected items, of which there are no more than ten, to the check-out counter. During this transport of goods he keeps up a steady stream of conversation with fellow customers or the clerk. Once Sherry has totalled the order and packed it in a small box or bag, the Stacker will stand for an extra minute or two at the end of the counter concluding his conversation. The time elapsed since the Stacker first came into the store is one hour.

Many of the Stacker customers are self-employed members of the community. These men have very flexible hours and come to the store whenever they please. For the Stacker, the store is a place for a social outing as it is for the Elderly and Retired shoppers. The difference between the Stacker and the Retiree is that the Retiree comes to the store with the express purpose of making a purchase. The Stacker differs from the Elderly shoppers in the manner in which he shops. His route through the store is a very random one. He prolongs his return home by the many

unnecessary back and forth trips which he makes through the store.

Children are always welcome in MacPherson's Store whether they come to buy candy or have been sent for a specific purpose. In the winter, children visit the store in a structured time frame, as there are only certain hours when they are not in school. The first visits are sometimes in the early morning. Children who live close to MacPherson's may run to the store before their school bus arrives at 8:15 a.m. Usually these young people come to buy a treat for lunch time or to run an errand for their mothers. When the school bus drops the children off in the afternoon at 2:30 p.m. it only takes about half an hour before a steady influx into the store begins. In this half-hour, the children go home to drop off their books and lunch-cans and change into play clothes.

In the summer, there are children running in and out of the store all day long and in the evenings after the store closes, the front steps are used as a 'hang-out.' In the summer the hours when children will come to the store are totally unpredictable.

Children in Margaree Valley are very comfortable

running in and out of MacPherson's Store. They are aware that the clerks and merchant do not mind their many trips in and out but they are also very aware of when they should or should not be in the store. When the store is busy, they stay away unless they have a specific purpose for being there. Purchases made by this group of shoppers are usually in the line of 'treats'--candy, drinks and ice cream. The selection of such goods takes much longer than the actual purchase. The neighbourhood children do not irritate the store personnel or the other customers. They wait very patiently to be served and do not demand attention. Young people rarely stay in the store for more than ten minutes at a time.

Areas that the children frequent are those nearest the cash register. Here the gum, candy, chocolate bars and potato chips are located. The other area they frequent is the pop cooler on the left side of the store. Children do not really shop unless they are on an errand and are looking for a specific product.

Outside the store the children collect around the air compressor. This is for two reasons: they

actually need to pump air in their bicycle tires and, it is an out-of-the-way place to 'hang around.'

Most children who frequent MacPherson's Store range in age from four to fourteen. These children have been coming to the store with their parents since they were infants. They know every inch of the inside and the outside store property. Local children are comfortable with the adults who work and shop at the store but they do not have much verbal interaction with them.

Four o'clock in the afternoon marks a new period in the day of the store known as the 'mail-rush' time by the clerks in the store. The mail arrives at the local post office at three-thirty in the afternoon but it is not sorted or distributed to the local people until four or shortly after. From four until six the customers are in and out of MacPherson's Store very quickly. Most of these customers are either on their way to the post office or on their way home after picking up their mail. They stop in at the local store to purchase last minute dinner necessities or to pick up their daily newspaper. This time of the day is made doubly busy by the arrival of the Milkman.

The Eastern Dairy Foods delivery truck arrives at MacPherson's Store three times a week, Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 4:30 p.m. Since the dairy foods are located at the rear of the store, the Milkman unloads his truck at the back door. After parking his truck, the Milkman comes into the building to check supplies on hand and, generally, to make his presence known to the staff--especially to Harold. If Harold does not have time to talk to him, he removes the out-dated goods, brings in the new supplies, stocks the showcase, and stores the surplus in the walk-in cooler next to the meat counter. When his work is complete, the Milkman and Harold exchange stories, news and jokes. When this bit of socializing ends, the Milkman writes up his bill and goes up to the check-out to receive payment.

This is newspaper time and prime time for socializing, an activity the Milkman enjoys. He chats with the cashier and any customer that happens to be there. By the time that he has collected a cheque from the cashier and says his final farewell to Harold, the Milkman has been in the store forty or fifty minutes. MacPherson's Store is the Milkman's

last stop of the day, hence he spends more time here. The Milkman is not from the immediate area of Margaree Valley, but he has been coming to MacPherson's Store for so many years that he knows and is known by everyone that shops there. As he does not come to the store every day, he is especially interested in what is new in the neighbourhood. He is very interested in the verbal news that he can pick up while on his route. He brings information about his home community, Margaree Forks, to the Valley and takes Valley news back to the Forks. Thus, the Milkman encourages social interaction in MacPherson's Store and in the Valley at large.

Since the Milkman comes to MacPherson's during a busy time of the day, he expects to interact socially with both customers and clerks. In addition to his primary function of supplying the store with dairy products he allots a specific time period for socializing with Harold and the people around the check-out counter.

Since the merchant's death, Harold is the most important character to visit in the eyes of the Milkman. He spends the largest amount of his

socializing time with Harold. They are able to have lengthy social interaction while working due to the proximity of the meat counter to the dairy foods display case and the walk-in cooler. The remainder of the Milkman's social interaction is on a general level. This changes the focus to socializing rather than a one-to-one personal exchange of information.

The layout of the store is significant to the Milkman. In addition to the dairy products being located at the rear of the store, the Milkman uses the back door so that he is able to see and visit with Harold before the rest of the store is really aware that he has arrived. When Harold is not busy he and the Milkman are able to have their chat in relative privacy.

Many customers adapt themselves and their shopping patterns to coincide with the arrival of the various daily papers. This provides a framework for late afternoon socializing. The Gossiper is the predominant visitor between 4:00 and 6:00 p.m., after they finish work at 4:30 or 5:00 p.m. but before they have had their evening meal. Due to weather conditions in the winter this pattern may grow

to include more people than four or five regulars.

The characters involved in this pattern are men. They arrive at the store 'at least thirty minutes' before the weekly gossip papers on Wednesday. This half-hour preparation time is important to Gossipers. During this time they are able to discuss local news and impending 'news releases' with their cronies who are also waiting for the papers. Gossipers are not usually interested in talking to the clerks to gain information, unless the 'news' directly pertains to them. The Gossiper can depend upon seeing the same people in the store every Wednesday night. The timing involved in these visits is not always exact but falls within an hourly span. A usual group of Gossipers would consist of two or more men but never exceeding five.

The area designated as a gossip zone is either the centre aisle or the potato zone, depending on customer activity. If a shopper wishes to pick up fruit or potatoes the Gossipers will gravitate toward the middle aisle. If a lady with a shopping cart is coming down the centre aisle, the Gossipers will certainly try to move out of the way--usually to the

potato zone. Whichever gossip arrives on the scene first chooses the socializing spot. The other Gossipers join the first and thus the area is determined. One criterion which governs where the Gossipers will gather is their wish to be 'out of the way.' These men enjoy socializing in MacPherson's Store and they do not want to inconvenience either the merchant or the other customers by their presence.

The length of time the Gossipers spend in the store may also change as they wait in anticipation of the arrival of the paper. The arrival of the papers designates the end of the social visiting. Departure is gradual; those in a hurry leave as soon as they are able to select a paper. Others are more leisurely, casually finishing their conversations and selecting any additional items they might need (milk, bread, cigarettes, etc.) before heading home. As a general rule, though, the arrival of the paper marks the end of the socializing time. Time elapsed for this pattern to be enacted is thirty to forty-five minutes.

Errand Runner shoppers come into MacPherson's Store between 5:30 and 5:45 p.m. daily. Their visit to the store is but one stop on their list of errands

which includes picking up the mail at the post office and their newspaper at the store. They do not have to meet normal postal hours because they have post office boxes. Therefore, the Errand Runners' mail pick-up is determined by the time the daily papers are delivered to MacPherson's. As soon as the Errand Runner selects his or her paper out of the pile on the stand, it is paid for and the Errand Runner leaves the store. This visit has taken ten minutes.

Errand Runners are men and women between sixteen and seventy years of age. The errands that these customers run usually fall within the time-frame of dinner preparation. If a mother must do the errands, she will leave the house after the dinner is in the oven and before it finishes cooking. A father will also go while dinner is being cooked. The pattern is to do all errands in one trip as opposed to many. While coming out to pick up the mail these people may stop and collect the children from friend's homes, drop into the Credit Union and then stop at MacPherson's for their paper and any grocery item needed for dinner. This visit to the store is very functional, not social, and is usually the last errand

on their list. Errand Runners are often on such a tight schedule that they leave their car engines running while they are in the store.

In addition to the customer patterns that correspond with a certain time of day, there are several patterns that can occur at anytime the store is open. One such pattern is that of the Guest. The merchant is called upon to play the role of a host in his store when the customer or client falls into the Guest pattern. Guests enter the store with the sole intent of talking directly to the merchant. Often, the Guest is a personal friend of the merchant or someone who knows him in another business context. Often, no purchase is made because the person in search of the merchant is not coming to shop but for another reason. The reason may be related to a committee he sits on or another community concern. These people come to the store because they know it is one place that the merchant might be found.

Time is a variable factor here based on the merchant's schedule and that of the other person involved. Power saw salesmen arrive early in the morning or at lunch time, figuring that the Merchant

will have to eat breakfast and lunch somewhere. These men also like to be included in the family meals. Other businessmen from outside the Valley visit during regular business hours of nine to five. Any businessman who comes regularly to MacPherson's knows that he should telephone before he arrives in the Valley to be sure the merchant will be home. Due to the irregular business commitments in which the merchant is involved, he does not have a predictable schedule. Fellow Margaree Valley businessmen and friends come to the store in the evenings looking for the merchant. They know that he is usually available at closing time.

As the Guest enters the store, he goes through the customary routine of scanning the room to see who is present. If the merchant is at the rear of the store and is not busy, he walks forward when he sees the Guest. Usually the two men will meet in the centre aisle. As the merchant involves the Guest in conversation, they slowly move out of the direct line of people traffic, over to the potato zone. The conversation in this area is short, general, and lasts for five minutes. While continuing to talk, the host

and guest move to the back of the store where they will stay for the duration of the visit. Talk in this location will have a specific purpose. Time elapsed for this visit is approximately one half hour.

The Investigator shoppers have no particular time of day when they like to be at MacPherson's. They appear anytime during the business day when they feel like having a 'little look around' just to see what is going on in the community. While in the store, the Investigator is intent on gleanng as much information about the community as is possible in one visit.

A typical Investigator, usually a man, enters through the front door, turns to the right to acknowledge the presence of the person attending the cash, turns left to see who is standing in the potato zone, and then looks down the centre aisle to make sure he knows who is at the back of the store. After such quick, but careful scrutiny, the Investigator selects with whom he would like to interact on the basis of who will disclose the most information.

When his social interaction is completed the Investigator will pick up his groceries (if he actually needed any), and leave. This visiting

customer has been in the store anywhere from ten to twenty-five minutes depending on the source and topic of his conversation.

Although similar to the Retiree and Elderly shopper in that he comes to the store mainly for a social outing, the Investigator differs greatly in personality from the other shoppers. Investigators are nosy and come to the store to look around. The Retirees and the Elderly shoppers have an inquisitive but genuine interest in the store and the people. The attitude of the Investigator is more to pick up on scandal than it is to be genuinely concerned. Investigators tend to see the negative side to situations mentioned whereas the Retirees and the Elderly see a positive or more favourable side. The Investigator is like the Gossiper in the amount of interest shown about what is going on in the store. The difference is that, while the Gossiper is an active verbal socializer and willing to talk to anyone, the Investigator is selective in whom he talks to, and tends to observe and interpret things with little verbal discussion.

The List Shopper comes to the store alone. He

carries with him a shopping list, written and compiled by his wife. When he enters the shop, he appears almost nervous, although he has been there many times before. He nods a greeting to the cashier and then goes to stand in the potato or meat counter zone. Here he restlessly awaits the approach of a clerk into whose hands he can thrust the list. Knowing the pattern well, the clerk fetches a shopping basket or cart, depending on the number of items on the list, and begins to assemble the goods. The List Shopper follows the clerk closely as the order is filled: Often the clerk asks the List Shopper's opinion on a brand preference or a replacement item. Usually the List Shopper feigns ignorance in such matters and asks the clerk to choose. When the list has been thoroughly checked and the goods taken to the counter, the List Shopper pays for his order and leaves. Time taken for the transaction is twenty or thirty minutes.

Usually the List Shopper is so uncomfortable in his role as customer that he cannot even enjoy his visit to the store on a social level. He will pass the time of day with the clerk waiting on him, but interaction with other customers is minimal. Only when

the order is being totalled by the cashier does the List Shopper stand back, take a deep breath and pretend that his visit to the store was very ordinary.

Margaree Valley men are not comfortable coming to the store for grocery shopping, but they are at ease socializing in the same environment. Due to this sense of uneasiness they have subtle ways of shifting this responsibility. If a man is forced to come to MacPherson's store alone to shop, he is usually a List Shopper. The males in Margaree Valley do not view shopping at the grocery store as a masculine task. Traditionally, they have driven their wives or female children to the store to shop. In addition to the fact that the List Shopper is uncomfortable in the position of shopping for groceries, he says that he is unfamiliar with, or would not know where to find, any of the items on his list. The clerks all know that the List Shopper is capable of filling his own order, but they respect his uneasiness and unquestioningly carry out the task for him.

A more common pattern for men is the Team Work pattern. Men bring their wives or older female children to the store to shop while they socialize.

The male form of participation in this shopping pattern is driving the female to the store and stepping up to the counter to pay for the order.

When the couple enters the store, they immediately separate. She takes a cart and begins selecting goods and he takes up a talking position at the front of the store. The female makes all of the purchasing decisions in a leisurely manner, knowing that her male companion is relaxed and enjoying his socializing. The female will cover the whole store before she has finished assembling her order. After picking up a cart at the front of the store she turns and immediately faces the special shelf. This is the first stop that she will make. After selecting from the special shelf her remaining walk through the store will be on a random basis. He, on the other hand, chooses to stand in the potato zone where he can see everyone who enters or leaves the store. From this position he can also see the check-out so he can watch for the female to approach the counter. The Team enter and leave together, share the cash check-out area, but their social interaction in the store is independently carried out.

When the order is completed and the female pushes her cart to the check-out, she unloads the cart and waits for the total to appear. When the man sees the last of the goods being piled on the counter, he strolls over to the cash register, taking out his wallet as he walks and continuing to carry on his conversation. He pays for the order while the female stands patiently, often talking to the cashier. The male carries his grocery order out to his car. The time elapsed for this pattern is forty-five to sixty minutes.

The previously described socializing patterns have only one person responsible for both the shopping and the socializing. In the Team Work pattern, one person talks and the other person shops. This pattern illustrates the clearly established sex roles in Margaree Valley. When the Team Work customers leave the store, the man passes on the information he has gained from his time of socializing. In this way the female also learns of recent community news.

The Harried Shopper is a woman who does not enjoy a visit to the store and is intent on filling her grocery requirements and rushing back outside to her

chauffeur. The chauffeur is usually a disgruntled husband waiting impatiently in the car. Obviously, this customer found it necessary to come to the store; she may have even had this trip scheduled but for some reason it is a bad day or time for the husband. As a result, he simply drives her to the store and sits in the car, refusing to let this visit be an enjoyable social outing for either of them. The woman, knowing her husband is sitting outside not socializing, hurries through her business in the store.

When this shopper enters the store, she immediately collects a cart and begins selecting the items on her list. She moves about the store very quickly and follows her list closely knowing that she does not have time for comparative pricing or alternate selections. Her only restful moments in the store are when she is in line waiting for her order to be processed. Regardless of how much of a hurry the Harried Shopper is in, she must wait for Sherry to ring in the items on the cash register, and she has a chance to talk with both the cashier and the packing clerk. Here, a definite bit of socializing takes place. This lady will not ignore social niceties

with other customers in the store but she does not encourage verbal interaction. A male clerk will carry her groceries out to her car in the absence of the male partner and she will talk to him as she walks out. The visit takes between twenty-five to forty minutes.

A major difference between Harried Shoppers and Team Work customers is that, although the man drives the woman to the store, he does not participate in the outing in any other way. His actual reason for not participating is not always clear to the people inside the store; they simply accept the fact that he is not feeling sociable. Actually, by not coming into the store, the man speeds up the shopping process. Since the woman knows that the man is waiting, she streamlines her conversation in the store and makes a conscious effort to assemble the groceries as quickly as possible. Unlike the Team Work customers, this woman must both shop and socialize, to a minimal degree, since she will be expected to share a tidbit of news when she joins her mate in the car. As well, a male clerk must replace the man of the Team Work pair and carry this customer's groceries to her car.

Several male shopping patterns have already been discussed. It is obvious that the shopping patterns of men differ from those of women. These differences are clearly illustrated in comparison of male and female Essential Shoppers who come to the store for essential grocery items such as milk, bread or butter.

The male Essential Shopper strolls into the store at a leisurely pace. As he enters, he greets the cashier and looks around to see who is in the store. After this quick but careful perusal, the Essential Shopper moves on to select the 'essentials' he has come for. He then proceeds slowly to the check-out allowing anyone who appears to be in more of a hurry than himself to precede him in line at the cash. He has a short chat with the cashier, pays for his goods and leaves the store. The time elapsed is twenty minutes.

As a direct contrast, the female Essential Shopper will literally run up the steps of the store and enter quickly. She does not take much notice of who is in the store but immediately goes to pick up what she has come to buy. While walking to the check-out, she takes notice of who is in the store and

the obvious topics of discussion. At the cash, she does not take time to chat but waits somewhat impatiently as her purchases are being totalled on the register. She pays and leaves the store no more than ten minutes after her hurried entry.

Running to MacPherson's for grocery essentials may be necessary at any time during the day. When the Essential Shopper is a male, he has usually been sent to the store by his wife who has a sudden grocery requirement that must be filled. Therefore, in most cases, the male does not respond in an urgent manner. The male rationalizes that it takes a certain amount of time to drive to the store, select and purchase an item. Therefore, if one must do all of the above one is entitled to enjoy a visit to the store. He also knows the person waiting at home for the 'essential' will not question the amount of time that the trip took as long as the needed item is supplied.

On the other hand, a female Essential Shopper concentrates totally on the purpose for which she comes to the store. Since the 'essential' item is most likely one that she needs to perform a specific task, she does not take time to socialize. The male

Essential Shopper has much more social interaction while in the store than does the female. He is very concerned with making his trip to the store serve a dual purpose. Since he has not come to the store of his own volition, he wants to take advantage of every available social opportunity while there. Female Essential Shoppers make it very plain that they are in a hurry. This visit to the store is a necessity, not a frivolous venture. Although the female shopper is aware of all the levels of interaction taking place in the store, she remains aloof and concentrates on the business at hand.

Any serious shopping that is carried out in the evening is usually done on Thursday and Friday nights. On these two nights, the store is open until 9:00 p.m. and evening shoppers can browse in the store in a leisurely manner. The Last Customers are usually couples that work all week and find evening the best time for grocery shopping. These customers do not rush, they have no deadlines and they enjoy a leisurely visit to the store. The woman will push her grocery cart up and down every aisle, while the man may actually walk around and pick up a few supplies

and carry them back to the grocery cart or put them on the end of the counter.

Since the Last Customers are relaxed shoppers they do not impose any feelings of urgency upon the staff at MacPherson's. These clients are used to the pressure of business and they can appreciate a relaxing atmosphere in which to carry out a weekly chore. Often such customers are peers of the merchant and, although they live in the same neighbourhood, their personal lives are such that they seldom interact socially. An opportunity such as shopping at the store provides a very comfortable social atmosphere for people whose paths would not otherwise cross. Although these people may run in and out of the store during the week for incidental items, they really enjoy such weekly, late-evening social occasions.

Ralph R. enjoys talking to these people and they enjoy visiting with him. Often the socializing takes precedence over filling the grocery cart, and closing time arrives before business is completed. Last Customers know Ralph R. will not put them out if they have not finished talking or shopping at his scheduled

closing hour. Ralph R. will simply close and lock the front door and send the clerks home. Ralph R. and the Last Customers will all leave together through the back door when business is finally over. Time elapsed is one hour to one hour and fifteen minutes.

The final shopper pattern evident at MacPherson's Store is that of the Irritant. Late at night, there is a knock on the door of the merchant's house. A member of the MacPherson family answers the door. The person standing outside may or may not be a community member. Usually the visitor is invited inside. As soon as the door closes, the visitor asks for Ralph R. If Ralph R. is not at home, the visitor then asks for Ralph's wife. Sometimes neither the merchant nor his wife are at home and the next question is, "Is there anybody here that could give me a bit of gas?" The family member agrees to go to the store to give gas. Then, the merchant's son or daughter, or sometimes friends of the young people, must get dressed for outside, take the keys and go to the store.

By the time the family member is ready, the Irritant has usually walked back to his car, which he has already parked in front of the gas pumps in

anticipation of being served. The person in the store turns the pumps on with a switch at the back of the store, walks to the front taps on the window to signal that the electricity is now on. The Irritant takes his required amount of gasoline while he is watched through the window. When he has finished, the person in the store turns off the pumps, goes out the back door of the store and locks the door. Usually the Irritant meets the family member outside the back door, money is exchanged and he leaves. If, however, change is needed, the Irritant follows the family member into the house to receive his change.

The store closes at 7:00 p.m. on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday and at 9:00 p.m. on Thursday and Friday nights. This entire routine will only take fifteen minutes, but it may happen any time from fifteen minutes after the store closes to 1:00 a.m. This entire pattern takes a maximum amount of twenty minutes from start to finish. No one at MacPherson's wishes to prolong the visit, hence they do nothing to encourage verbal interaction. When the Irritant makes his request, he usually tries to smooth over the moment by making small talk. However, the merchant,

wishing to show his disapproval, is polite but selective with his responses.

This example of 'after-hours' shopping is a very common occurrence for the MacPhersons. Over the years the MacPherson merchants have tried to make their store competitive by being extra considerate of the individual consumer. As a result of this business practice, the present merchant, like his predecessors, goes out of his way to accommodate customer idiosyncrasies, often to the point of inconveniencing himself and his family. Irritants regularly knock on the MacPherson's door requesting entrance to the store; as a result there is always someone at home at MacPherson's, and the knocking on the door is always answered.

If the after-hours visitor had an important or urgent reason for coming to the merchant's home after-hours, he would not be labelled as an Irritant. The aggravating factor about most Irritant customers is that they are usually persons who could have been at the store when it was open but were not. Given the size of Margaree Valley, the merchant knows many personal things about the Irritant. For example, the

Irritant is always a male, usually unemployed, and only shops at MacPherson's when he wants to make a credit purchase or when he wants gasoline. With credentials such as these it is no wonder the merchant and his family view him as irritating.

Throughout this chapter, I have described how MacPherson's store is a centre for social interaction in Margaree Valley. Based on my fieldwork, I conclude that people in the community have chosen to socialize at MacPherson's store for several reasons. Due to the economic situation and types of employment found in Margaree, there are few work environments in which to socialize. The other possibilities for social interaction are schools and churches; however, such social events would be sporadic, not spontaneous. In addition, the one other store in the neighbourhood is a convenience store and not conducive to socializing in the leisurely and lengthy fashion which Margaree people enjoy. The atmosphere at MacPherson's is always welcoming, and hence predictable. This final point is perhaps the most significant one. The predictable environment, combined with the hospitality offered, makes MacPherson's store a place where

everyone in the community feels at ease. Just as the staff at the store accept the eccentricities of the customer, the customers accept the peculiarities of the staff.

Integral to this discussion of predictability of customers is the concept of socializing zones in the store. Each zone or socializing location is unique with regard to the kind of people who meet there, the type of information exchanged, the socializing that occurs, and the number of people involved in such interaction. These established socializing zones provide insight into the nature of the people who use them by establishing whether the information exchanged is private, semi-private, secretive, public or personal.

As a method of analyzing social interaction I examined and identified established patterns in the daily and weekly routines of Valley people. The patterns followed by the people of Margaree, and routines followed in MacPherson's store, are not mutually exclusive--they are interdependent. By identifying these patterns, I was able to recognize the needs and characteristics of customers at

MacPherson's general store.

NOTES: CHAPTER V

¹ The Eastern Bakeries Bread truck, which comes four times a week to MacPherson's is always at the store at 7:00 a.m. It comes on Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

² Three fulltime clerks work at MacPherson's. A fourth person, a family member, is on call for the busy times.

³ Each morning and evening in the summer, and on Monday, Wednesday and Friday in the winter, a passenger and freight bus stops at MacPherson's store. It leaves the store at 8:30 a.m. en route to Sydney, N.S. and returns at 5:30 p.m.

⁴ Cheticamp is located 35 miles from Margaree Valley.

⁵ The Trans-Canada Highway is located 50 miles from Cheticamp.

CHAPTER VI: TALK AND NARRATIVE: THE CONTENT

Talk is present in MacPherson's General Store every hour that it is open for business. People talk constantly. On a superficial level one might say that talk consists of the exchange of general information between two or more people. These exchanges may be as simple as a greeting or as complex as a discussion of a specific topic. The extent to which talking occurs in MacPherson's Store greatly depends on who is present in the store, who is willing to listen, the time of day, and the subject being discussed. There is more talk in the general store during the winter months than during the summer because employment is seasonal in Margaree Valley and, in the winter, people have more time to stand about and talk. Small noticed a similar 'talk' pattern in his study of a small Newfoundland community:

One of the most salient features of Community talk, however, is its organization on a seasonal and occupational base. Because of the ecological nature of the community, the lives of people are organized very much around the seasons and these time spans dictate to a large degree what people do and consequently what they talk about.¹

Talk is organized into three general categories by the people of Margaree Valley: conversation, stories, and news. General 'conversation' is basically information exchange--sometimes personal, and sometimes not. 'Stories' are personal experience narratives, both current and historical, and humorous narratives. 'News' is any occurrence that is not commonplace in the community, and any information that is not generally known.

A. Conversation

Simple conversational responses found in MacPherson's Store can be defined as an exchange of impersonal information that is pertinent to the immediate environment. A customer may ask, "Where are the beets?" and the only reply necessary is a

direct one giving the specific information: "'Over by the pop.'" Another customer may stand looking at the meat display case until Harold approaches and asks, "'Can I help you?.'" The reply might be, "'I'm looking for something for supper.'" This is just the introduction that Harold needs; he suggests: "'We have some nice lookin' chicken this week.'" The response: "'I had chicken last night so that won't do.'" Harold is never without a second suggestion, "'Well now, how about a little stew meat and some nice fresh vegetables?'" The customer may or may not accept Harold's suggestions. In response to a suggestion that she does not agree with, the customer qualifies her answer so that it generates an additional comment from Harold. The exchange may end here or might even serve as an introduction to a more lengthy conversation with Harold. This conversation as it stands is merely an exchange of information relative to the immediate necessity of helping a customer decide on what to serve for the evening meal. Harold is not interested in what this particular shopper served for dinner the night before, nor is she disclosing specific information for a purpose; they

are both making simple responses as they attempt to carry out a business transaction.

Another example of such simple conversational responses frequently heard at MacPherson's takes place at the check-out counter where a customer has just finished paying for her groceries. She is exchanging a final word with the cashier when Robert approaches the counter. Robert, seeing that the customer has finished her transaction says, "What are you driving today?" The lady responds, "The usual." Robert then picks up the box, or bags, of groceries and carries them out to the customer's car where he puts them in the back seat. Car doors are never locked in Margáree Valley. If the customer wants the groceries put in the trunk she will immediately follow Robert outside so that she can open the trunk. If not, she will stay inside until she finishes talking to the cashier while he places the groceries in her car.

The carry-out service is provided for female customers and the elderly people who shop at the store. Customers are not asked if they want to have their groceries carried out to their cars. It is a service very much taken for granted by both

parties involved. As a male clerk sees a female or elderly customer prepare to leave, he simply comes up to the counter, grabs the box, and then asks what vehicle is being driven by the customer and where he should put the groceries. The conversation follows a well recognized pattern needing no introduction or conclusion. It is an example of simple conversational responses in the general store.

Children are very often the source of simple questions and responses. This example of interchange between cashier and child takes place as a shopper and her son enter the store. Lena, the cashier, is not busy and she takes the opportunity to talk to the youngster.

LENA: Hello Derek. How are you today? (Derek looks at the floor shyly.)

MOTHER: He's a bit shy today, I guess.

LENA: Oh, he shouldn't be shy with me. We had a great talk yesterday when he was in with his Grandfather.

MOTHER: You did? Well he didn't tell me that Grandpa brought him to the store. What did Grandpa buy you?

DEREK: Candy.

LENA: Was it good?

DEREK: Yes.

MOTHER: I'm telling you his Grandfather would buy him anything. I try to keep him away from too much junk but he continues to buy it.

LENA: Isn't that the way though....

MOTHER: Yes, it is. Well let's go down back and see Harold, Derek. We have to get some meat for supper.

Lena has a special interest in children and she always makes a point of speaking to them. When Lena identifies her previous conversation with Derek, she establishes rapport with him and also includes his mother. Parents appreciate their children receiving an added bit of attention from the clerks in the store. Whether the child responds to the questions or not, the parent will often interject comments and thus an entire conversation between adults can be carried out through the child. Children can often be good conversation topics and catalysts and serve as a common point of discussion between adults in the store.

Talk is incessant in the store. It goes on all day. Many times there is no obvious purpose to the talk; it is a rambling conversation that has no obvious beginning or ending and includes anyone who wishes to take part. The following example includes

the author as the cashier:

HAROLD: One time I was out chasin' cows and out came Angus and began barkin' at the cows. Just like a dog would.

CASHIER: Is Angus affected by the moon?

HAROLD: He's affected!! and it doesn't have to be the moon!

CUSTOMER: Was he able to round up the cows? There's not many good dogs today that can round up the cows. Nobody takes the time to train their dogs....

(Robert Hart returns to the store from his dinner

break and Harold leaves. The conversation begins

again. The customer begins a story about Jim Harris.)

CASHIER: Would he be a Toood? I mean Jim?

ROBERT: No. You've got the wrong bunch. Peter would be a Toood, not Jim. The Thomases are Tooods and the other fellow is a Harris.

CUSTOMER: Anyway, if you think that Margaree is bad for nicknames, you should hear some of the ones in [names community]....The MacRaes are known as the Rabbits, and there's the Harlot....

CASHIER: Margaree has Rabbits too. The Ingrahams have always been called the Rabbits. And what about the Burtons. Grandpa told me that they were the Paps or the Kittys. Isn't that right?

A car pulls up to the gas tanks and Robert has to go out to serve them. I get busy at the cash and the customer waits around until someone new comes in to

talk to him.²

The previous dialogue is an example of general conversation used to pass the time. The topics from such conversation arise as the participants think of something new to say, or as some action happens in the store that those standing around can comment upon.

The clerks and the customers at MacPherson's are very versatile in their ability to talk on many subjects. The clerks are expected to be ready and willing to pass comment on the topics that the clients bring up. Often regular shoppers at the store have set topics that they discuss with the individual clerks. Common interests often generate the topics of conversation. One regular customer said that she always talks to Sherry about dieting and recipes, and to Robert about church functions:

CUSTOMER: Well, Sherry, how's the dieting going? Are you sticking with it?

SHERRY: Yes, this time I am. I get so disgusted though, one day I'm up and the next day I'm down. I've reached a plateau and I'm downright disgusted.

CUSTOMER: Well, at least you're doing better than I am. I know I should try but every time the cupboards get empty, somebody's complaining that there's nothing to eat. Then I have to bake. You're looking good

though.

✓
SHERRY: Thanks, it's good to hear that. Have you tried that new fruit-packed in its own juice? I ordered some last week and it's great for breakfast. Supposed to have less calories.

CUSTOMER: No. I haven't tried it. You were telling me about it a while ago. Where is it? I'll buy a couple of cans. Just add them on to the rest of this and I'll pick them up when I leave.

This customer and Sherry are both avid dieters and they have similar discussions every time they meet. Both of them enjoy trying new foods, recipes and commiserating over trying to lose weight. Their conversations are always along this line unless there is some major news item that is more worthwhile discussing.

When this particular customer runs into Robert in the store, she always takes time to discuss church matters. Both the customer and Robert attend the local Baptist church and although they see each other every Sunday, they do not have the opportunity to talk at church. When they meet in the store they are on neutral ground and are more free to express their exact opinions on the Sunday speaker or other church business.

ROBERT: What did you think of that fellow's sermon Sunday night?

CUSTOMER: I really enjoyed him. I could have stayed on an extra hour just to hear what else he had to say on that chapter in James.

ROBERT: Yeah, he was good, wasn't he? It's too bad we couldn't get someone like him to fill the pulpit. We never seem to get a really strong speaker.

CUSTOMER: Well, now Mr. Ronald was good...

ROBERT: Yeah, good with the young people but gosh, his morning services weren't good, or I didn't think they were. I get awful tired of those sermons that run for weeks along the same theme.

CUSTOMER: Seems to be that all ministers get carried away with those continuous themes. I really didn't mind his sermons though.

ROBERT: Did you ever hear Mr. Warren? Now he was a great speaker.

CUSTOMER: Warren? No-o-o, I couldn't have been here then. When was he here?

ROBERT: Let's see, oh, probably around 1962 or '63, around there.

CUSTOMER: Oh, that's before I came to Margaree. I didn't move here until 1969 so I never heard him.

These conversations may be of the rambling sort, like that above, or they may be directed along a particular line such as, direct reference to points made in the sermon or conflicts that have arisen

within the church congregation. Robert and the customer respect one another's opinions and these chats in the store are beneficial to both of them. The customer is the kind of person who is able to jump comfortably from topic to topic relative to the clerk with whom she is speaking. This ability makes her a favourite of both Robert and Sherry.

B. Stories

Stories may consist of either personal experience narratives and/or humorous narratives. In some cases, a story may be both a personal experience and a humorous narrative. Recounting personal experiences is a common part of everyday social interaction. The frequent use of personal experience narratives in everyday conversation was commented upon by William Labov and Joshua Waletzky in 1967.³ The two functions of personal narratives as stated by Labov and Waletzky were referential and evaluative. Robinson summarized them as,

The referential function...to describe the action--the time, place, participants, and details of the incident. The evaluation

function is to identify the narrator's interpretation of the incident, his personal reactions, and the consequences of the incident for himself or significant others.⁴

Personal narratives are told for a reason--whether as a means of subjectively describing an incident for the listener(s) or, as a method of evaluation whereby the teller is seeking to confirm that he made the right decision and that he ascribes to the 'socially sanctioned belief and values' of the community.

The narrative is the most complex form of talk in the store. A narrative requires an animated presentation by the speaker--a performance. This performance is an entertaining monologue volunteered by the speaker to an audience. Its structural elements include an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Often, the conclusion is of a humorous nature. The length of the discourse is relative to the immediate factors that exist in the environment. These factors include the number of people in the store, how busy the clerks are, who else is in the store, the long-windedness of the teller, the haste of the listeners and the newness of the information disclosed.

The speaker tries to make the presentation memorable enough that it can be repeated and generate a similar response with a new audience. A good narrative bears repetition. If the teller receives a favourable response from the first narrative, the inclination will be to either repeat it or tell another. Occasionally, one of the listeners repeats the narrative at another gathering. If one tries to repeat the narrative, then it is usually prefaced by giving credit to the originator. If not, then more than likely, they will be informed by the listener(s) that they are repeating another person's story. Some narratives have been told so often that they are associated only with the original teller. Whether or not a narrative is successful depends on the audience response. Good audience responses involve suitably expressive reaction at the proper moments. In order to do this, one must be a good listener. A good listener is someone who is not in a hurry, knows and understands the community and the people, maintains eye contact, gives encouraging responses and, whose past is, in some way, linked with that of the teller. The more these two factors, teller and listener, have

in common the greater the chance a narrative will occur.

The most common form of narrative encountered in MacPherson's General Store was humorous. The following examples of narratives include a brief analysis of the narrator/performer (who tells the story), the listener/audience (who is told the story), the content (what is told), and the reason (why the narrative is told).

Margaree Valley natives have their own definition of humour. The funniest individuals are referred to as having a 'good sense of wit.' 'Wit' means a dry and subtle sense of humour. The following examples of Margaree wit have been recorded in MacPherson's Store.

That reminds me of the time my mother went up to Pat Thomas and his wife at a picnic over the river. My mother asked Mrs. Thomas how she was feeling and she said, 'Miserable, just miserable.' Pat spoke up and said, 'Why don't you tell her you're sick dear -- you've been miserable all your life!'

Ralph R. tells this short anecdote after listening to another fellow tell one in a similar vein. It is 7:30 a.m. on a cold winter morning and Ralph and the other three men are enjoying a bit of

socializing before they disperse to their individual places of employment. All of the men present are familiar with the characters in Ralph's narrative, thus, they can appreciate the humour. When the laughter finishes one fellow says, 'It sounds just like him!' and they all chuckle again.

To an outsider this narrative would probably not receive much more than a smile but to Ralph and his peers this same story is worth a laugh. They knew that Pat Thomas was a local character and were impressed by his ability to turn an innocent inquiry into a witty remark. The personality of Mrs. Thomas, as a complainer, is also subtly mentioned in this passage. The character nuances insinuated by Ralph R.'s narrative are the real source of humour to the men and that is the reason Ralph has chosen this story. He knew it would provoke laughter from his companions and would encourage them to tell more stories. Although Ralph was preparing to leave the group and go on to other business matters, he did not wish the group to disperse on his account. So, he chose an amusing narrative as an exit-line and left while the men were still chuckling:

Well, poor old Martha Timmons was in today. Gosh! her eyesight is bad, otherwise she says she feels great. Yeah, those old people are tough.... It was funny the time she was in...you know, it's only her eyesight that's bad? Well, she was at the counter and Sherry was checking her out. Sherry was talking to her in a very loud voice and Martha looked at her said, 'Sherry dear, I'm blind--not deaf!'

Harold loves to tell a story with a funny ending and this is one of his favourites. He would tell this anecdote many times simply changing the characters around to suit his audience. His audience is anyone willing to listen, particularly those closely associated with older people. The humour is found in the fact that most people know Martha Timmons to be a sweet little old lady who never makes such sharp replies. Coincidentally, Martha is able to 'get one over' on Sherry and stand up for her abused ear drums. Harold's reasons for telling such a story stem from Harold and Sherry being verbal sparring partners and each likes to think that he has an advantage over the other. Harold also enjoys hearing sharp retorts and since this one was directed toward Sherry, he loves to repeat it.

Harold's amusing narratives are usually not

original. However, the nature of his job is such that he has the opportunity to interact with some of Margaree Valley's finest narrators. One such narrator was a man named Pat. Harold told this story:

We'd wait for Fridays to come so that Pat would come over and tell stories. Pat would stay all day if people would talk to him, or listen to him. I remember him telling this one, he said, '...that old Dorothy! I wish she'd stay out of my potato patch! She's only getting every second row.'

The joke here is that Dorothy is a very bow-legged woman. If she were walking through Pat's garden, the implication here is that her legs would be so bent that she would only step on every second row of his potatoes. Although Harold tries to tell this story as Pat would, he cannot quite carry it off. He must preface this story by saying that the original teller was Pat because the style of the story is recognizable as one of Pat's and because Pat and Dorothy were next door neighbours and very likely related to each other. In Margaree Valley, if one is related or has some other close connection with the character in the story the narrative is both more believable and more acceptable.

The characters in this story are not interchangeable because not many Margaree people have Dorothy's physical deformity. It may seem cruel for Pat to be laughing at Dorothy however, many of the humorous accounts told by Margaree Valley raconteurs stress physical attributes or failings. One reason for this is that it makes such deformities more acceptable in Valley society. Physical handicaps are noticed by everyone but most people are too considerate to mention such things in public. Narrators are often the voice of the public and say what others are thinking. Laughing at such human failings removes the uncomfortable feelings surrounding such a condition. The subtlety of this narrative is that not once does Pat overtly say anything about Dorothy's deformity. He is merely commenting on something that everyone in the Valley has noticed but would never publicly mention. By attaching Pat's name to this account, the narrative becomes part of the verbal narrative network in Margaree Valley.

Pat was also known to play practical jokes. One of his favourite victims was Arthur, a merchant and

undertaker who lived on the west side of the river. This narrative was told by Osgood as he sat in his favourite narrating spot, on the stool behind the counter.

Osgood often found Pat's type of humour tiresome but he enjoyed telling stories about him:

That Pat can be awful foolish! I remember him telling about one time when he played a joke on Arthur. Arthur 'was drivin' the hearse this day and he stopped in here at the store for something. He parked out front and came inside. While he was in here Pat drove up. He [Pat] spotted the hearse out front and noticed that there was nobody in it. So he [Pat] parked his truck way over by the church so Arthur wouldn't see it when he came out. Then Pat climbed in the back of the hearse, where the coffin was. Arthur came out of the store, got in and drove away. He was gettin' down through the swamp, and there were a lot of bumps in the road. Well Arthur was goin' right along [quite fast] when all of a sudden this hand came through the curtains and rested on his shoulder [Arthur's]. A voice said, 'Take it easy on the bumps, will you!' Well, I guess Arthur nearly jumped out of his skin!

Osgood told this narrative one Friday morning to Harold and the author while he was sitting near the check out. His memories of Pat were incited by Harold's reference to missing Pat's Friday visits. Even though the audience is one familiar with local characters and styles of narrative, Osgood notes that

this is one of Pat's stories and not an original.

Many versions of this narrative survive in the verbal tradition of the Valley; whether or not the facts are true is not a matter of consideration by those who repeat the story. In fact, no one even recalls the first time that Pat told this narrative--they simply remember and repeat the narrative. Neither Pat nor Arthur is still living hence the memory of them is fading, as is the audience who could possibly appreciate these stories. The two previous narratives show Pat as a character but in each the narrator is careful to point out that the story is also Pat's. A local narrator would never repeat such a tale without giving credit to the originator. Seasoned inhabitants of the Valley would immediately recognize the style and content of such a story as belonging to the inimitable Pat.

Subtle insinuations are common in the narratives found in Margaree Valley. Subtlety is a major component of the Valley definition of 'wit.' One man who is still remembered for his style and wit is Ralph E. MacPherson. Stories were told about him by his family, his peers and even by people who have no

actual memory of him, but who have heard the accounts.

This narrative was told by his grandson, Ralph R.:

It was one of the times he went to the hospital. He had a toe removed, you know. Well, when he came home Margaret came in to see him. She would say anything. He didn't talk much. He's sitting in the kitchen by the stove with his foot up and his coat and hat on, like he was ready to leave. So, Margaret said, 'How's your toe, Ralph?' He just looked at her (for a moment) and said, 'I don't know. I left it in the hospital.'

Ralph R. repeats a story he has heard many times, to an audience, of men who have also heard and laughed at his narrative before. Each of them remembers Ralph and Margaret and this recitation revives memories of these characters.

In order to help recreate these memories Ralph R. is careful to point out specific personality traits of both individuals. Margaret is portrayed as the inveterate busybody asking questions of the reticent merchant. The memories Ralph has stirred up will probably cause his audience to recall and recite other narratives which will accentuate similar personality traits of Ralph E., the old merchant. This is Ralph R.'s intent when he introduces the narrative element into his conversation with these men. He is hoping to

elicit either new stories or repeated versions of narratives he has enjoyed before. In this particular case, his strategy works. One gentleman in the audience, Mr. Morrison, offered successive Ralph E. narratives:

Dr. MacGarry, he was an MP [Member of Parliament], and another doctor fellow came into Ralph's forge one day. Dr. MacGarry said, 'Good day. You workin' hard Ralph?' Ralph said, 'Oh, I don't know if I'm workin' that hard.' The other doctor, trying to make conversation says, 'Someday they'll find you dead in here, Mr. MacPherson!' and Ralph looked up, 'Jingus Sir! They'll find a lot more dead in your office than in my forge!' You know, 'Jingus Sir!' was a saying of Ralph's. I can still hear it. 'Jingus! Jingus Sir!' I remember one time... It was when the Credit Union meetings started up around here. Now that wasn't so popular with Ralph. After all he was a private businessman trying to make a go of it. In his ledgers were people owing him thousands of dollars. So, Kenny Austin and some other young men walk into the store one evening, all dressed up. Kenny is carrying a fancy new brief case. Ralph asked what was going on and one young fellow said, 'Mr. MacPherson, you should come. It's a Credit Union meeting.' Ralph looked up and said, 'Jingus Sir! I ran a credit union all my life and none of you ever got that dressed up for me!'

Although Mr. Morrison remembers Ralph E., he would have been a very young man when Ralph ran the store in Margaree Valley. His narratives are detailed

and help capture a sense of Ralph E.'s personality. However, Mr. Morrison is not an entertaining raconteur and these narratives suffer because of it. He often stumbles over words and repeats sentences as he presents his narratives. The audience is familiar with both Mr. Morrison's inferior narrating ability and the accounts he chooses to tell. Such a knowledgeable audience can smile and laugh at the right places, all the while remembering more enjoyable versions of the narratives.

Mr. Morrison's two anecdotes show Ralph E.'s abilities to maintain control of the situation in both his forge and general store. In the first account, Ralph is irritated by two canvassing political candidates. These men show up at his forge; perfectly attired and ready to chat while Ralph himself is involved in strenuous manual labour. Such distinctions immediately colour Ralph's perception of the meeting. He is trying to conduct business and the two politicians are disrupting his routine. Ralph E. established his no-nonsense work principles at the very start of the meeting by continuing to work as the doctors attempt to make polite conversation. With

the tone of the visit established and Ralph E. making no effort to ease the situation, the two men soon depart. That, of course, is Ralph E.'s ultimate aim. He did not make time to exchange polite social amenities while standing over a hot fire in his forge.

In the second narrative told by Mr. Morrison, Ralph E. is in his store. This story is prefaced with Mr. Morrison's mention of Ralph E.'s favourite exclamation which he uses to make the character of Ralph E. appear more realistic. Ralph E.'s role in this narrative was that of observer until he was solicited to attend a gathering of which he did not approve. Prior to the arrival of the school teacher, Kenny Austin, Ralph E. was not even curious as to why the young men were all dressed up. His curiosity was piqued when Kenny Austin arrived at the store, dressed in a suit and carrying a brief case. When Ralph discovered the reason for the number of young men standing about in his store, wearing their Sunday best, he could not allow the opportunity of having such a captive audience pass him by. It was a very appropriate moment for him to hint at the delinquent accounts some of these same young men held

at MacPherson's Store. It was this ability to size up a situation and critically comment upon it that earned Ralph E. his reputation of being a 'witty' man.

Shoplifting is an on-going problem at MacPherson's Store. It is very difficult to control since it involves not only suspecting one's neighbour, but actually accusing the person. The following narratives were recounted by another Valley merchant's wife after a suspected individual left MacPherson's Store.

CUSTOMER: I remember the time I caught Young Alec. It's hard to do but I wasn't going to let him get away with it. I was there alone and he arsed around and I knew darned well he was going to latch onto one of those bottles of vanilla. And I was busy and there was nothing I could do about it. So anyway, by the time Alec got to the counter everybody was gone and I went over and looked and sure enough a big bottle of vanilla was gone. I thought, 'You've got it boy! and you're gonna pay for it!' So he asked for makins' [cigarette papers] and I just whooped [threw] them over the counter. And he wasn't quite fast enough and they slid on the floor. I said, 'Oh, sorry Alec.' And he bent down to pick up the makins' and there was the bottle of vanilla in his back pocket. So I said, 60 cents for the makins' and whatever papers or whatever, and \$1.79 for that bottle of vanilla in your back pocket.'

LENA: What did he say?

CUSTOMER: He never flinched a muscle. Now, wouldn't you just die? But I got it out of him!

LENA: We weren't as smart or as bright as you. One

winter Robert and I were in the store, and we knew that Susie was snitching stuff. So anyway, we decided that we were going to watch her. I said to Robert, 'You go down back and I'll cover up here.' Well, in she came, didn't speak or look at us. She started skirting the aisles, up one and down the other. Every time she looked up she saw either me or Robert. Well, anyway we were watching her. And you know, she's got awful eyes on her that Susie! And oh! every now and again she'd look up and here we were lookin', and then she'd go behind another [shelf]. So anyway, finally she realized she wasn't going to get anything today-- but she was frustrated! On her way out the door she stopped, turned to look at us, and said: 'You bastards!' Well, we couldn't help but laugh but she didn't get anything that day!

The customer speaking with Lena is the daughter of a general store merchant and is married to the son of another general store merchant. Since she helped operate a general store in North East Margaree, she has had ample experience with shoplifters. She recounts this tale to show her friend Lena that she can sympathize with her problems. However, the customer was a more determined detective than Lena and she uncovered the mystery of the missing vanilla by tricking the suspect. Also, she was not uncomfortable letting Alec, the culprit, know he had been discovered.

Lena follows the customer's narrative with a similar story about shoplifting. Both narratives take

place by the check-out of MacPherson's store. The customer is paying for her purchases and Lena is fretting over allowing a suspected shoplifter to leave the store without catching him. This incident is what led Lena to disclose her other shoplifting story. With the exception of the author these ladies are alone, thus they feel free to disclose information about some of their customers.

Every January since 1978 the MacPherson merchants have posted a notice in their store stating that as of January 31, credit will no longer be offered at the store. All clerks are told to refuse credit to people who ask for it. This stern ultimatum first breaks down when the merchant decides that other businesses in the area may be allowed purchases on a credit basis with end-of-the-month payment. The next category of clients that breaks down the new credit-ruling are the families with stable credit ratings. Finally, the so-called 'down-and-outers' wheedle their way into the merchants' good graces and they too are allowed to buy on credit. When the number of credit customers reaches the saturation level, which it does every year, then Lena takes the entire matter into her

hands.

Lena is the bookkeeper for MacPherson's Store. Since she knows that Ralph R., like his father, finds it impossible to refuse someone asking for credit, she tries to insist that customers must approach her, and not her husband, Ralph R., when they request credit. Margaree people however, know that Ralph R. always agrees to a credit purchase and says each time, 'This must be the last time though.' These people also know that Lena eventually agrees to credit but she delivers her permission for a credit purchase alongside a lecture and a thorough discussion of the accounts in arrears. However, sometimes these customers can even pull the wool over Lena's eyes. Her daughter recounted this tale:

Well, Helen came into the store. She asked for Dad [Ralph R.] but I knew not to tell her where he was. So then she asked for Mom [Lena]. I told her that Mom was in the house. She went out the door and walked up the yard. I called Mom on the intercom and told her to expect Helen. So Helen went in and asked Mom if she could 'get a few baking things until the end of the week.' [This means on credit with supposed payment occurring on Friday or Saturday.] Mom said the usual, "I suppose. But Helen, do you realize that your account is now over whatever [an amount]?" Helen said she realized the amount but that she'd be doing

something to correct that soon. So, Helen came back to the store and told me [Marilyn was working at the check-out], that Mom said 'Yes.' I believed her, 'cause I knew Mom would say that. So Helen begins stocking the cart. I'll bet you it came to over \$70.00 worth of stuff. She bought like six cartons of cigarettes and all this other junk. Later on Mom came put to the store and asked me how much Helen's order had been. When I told her the amount was over \$70.00 she nearly went through the roof! I had to laugh but Mom couldn't believe it. I'd hate to be in Helen's shoes when she sees Mom the next time.'

The narrator in this example is the merchant's daughter, Marilyn. Marilyn often works in the store when she comes home from school and she is well aware of the number of people who request credit in the store. It is difficult for the regular clerks to deny credit and even harder for someone who works in the store occasionally. This particular narrative was told to two other clerks in the store, Robert and Harold. They had been discussing credit practices in the store and the leniency of the merchant in allowing people to charge purchases. Helen is a notorious credit customer and she never keeps her word concerning repayment. Knowing both Helen and Lena, the clerks can have a great chuckle over this story. It is worth knowing that Lena has since established

the ruling that not only must she approve all credit requests, but she will follow such approval or disapproval with a phone call to the cashier verifying her decision.

Some people in Margaree Valley use the general store, and the staff, for purposes other than business. Usually, these people are elderly and they expect the general store to serve the same function as did the general store of their youth. The staff at MacPherson's does not mind performing such services. In the following example the merchant's wife is approached by a customer asking for assistance:

Mrs. Smith came in the other morning with a letter in her hand. She thrust it at me and said, 'Read this.' So I opened it and read it to her. It was from her sister and she [the sister] mentioned that she had just had a birthday. Well, Mrs. Smith couldn't believe that she had forgotten her sister's birthday. So, she went down to the card rack, called Harold over, and had him read some birthday cards to her. She came back up to the counter and paid for the card. The next day she came back. This time she bought a box of chocolates. She brought them up to the counter and TOLD me to wrap them for her. So, I wrapped the box. I was just about to tape the paper when Mrs. Smith said, 'Oh, I should put a note in that.' I thought she'd just scribble a note off but instead she began dictating her note to me. So I wrote it down, stuck it in the package, she thanked me and left.⁹

Lena recounts this narrative to a man and his wife who have been standing in the check-out line behind an elderly gentleman. The couple comment, after the old gentleman has departed, on how good it is to see this man still able to carry out his own shopping. Several more comments of this nature are made before Lena recites her account of the resourcefulness of Mrs. Smith.

Mrs. Smith is a widow who lives approximately one quarter of a mile from MacPherson's Store. She is a boarder at a local retirement home and is not originally from Margaree Valley. Harold explained to Lena after the couple left that Sherry always wraps her packages and sells her stamps (which are not normally sold in the store) so that she will not have to walk to the Post Office. This narrative took place next to the check-out.

As Lena and Harold finished talking about Mrs. Smith, another customer came into the store. This particular customer was the granddaughter of Ralph E. She had not been to Margaree Valley in several years. After greeting Lena and Harold, the conversation

switched to reminiscing about her childhood in Margaree Valley. The customer's visit revived her memories of both Ralph E. and Osgood. As she walked around the store she commented on 'the way things used to be.' When she reached the back door, she met Ralph R. coming into the store. With Ralph R. as her audience, the customer began telling stories.

CUSTOMER: Grandpa [Ralph E.] always had an answer. I remember one time, it was the year they had the earthquake around here. I suppose it was 1928, or around there. Grandpa was up in the forge and he was reading the Halifax Chronicle. Now, he never read that paper 'cause it was a Liberal paper.

RALPH R.: That's for sure. He wouldn't want to be seen with it.

CUSTOMER: But someone left it in the forge and he picked it up...[to read it]. While he was reading it the earth started to tremble and rumble and things were shaking. Grandpa left the forge and started home. People were out standing on their lawns and everyone was talking about earthquake. As Grandpa neared the house he passed the minister and another man. He [Ralph E.] nodded and said, 'I knew God would be upset that I was reading that Liberal paper.' as he walked into his yard. Oh-h-h-h, he'd give you an answer all right. But he wasn't really a talker. Now Os, [Osgood] God love him, he loved to talk. Everybody liked Os. He was fine, fine man. If you were stuck and he had a cent he'd give it to you. Everybody thought the world of him. He was so easy to get along with... and so-o-o good natured. I remember, Os was a terrible fast driver when he got his first car. He was a wonderful driver though. And he'd be showin' off, I suppose. Young Mose was standin' outside of Jim's store. Somebody asked him what time it was. Mose said, 'It's six o'clock.' 'Oh

Mose,' they said, 'you're fast.' 'I know I'm fast,' said Mose, 'fastest damn thing on wheels except for Clune Ralph!'

RALPH R.: I used to hear my father talk about that car. It was a 1922 Chev touring car. Those were quite the cars, they had no glass windows, just curtains, and no hard roof -- like our convertible. I can imagine Dad [Osgood] would be pretty quick at the wheel. Why did you say he was called Clune or Cluney?

CUSTOMER : See, Ralphie dear, Grandpa [Ralph E.] didn't like Osgood for a name. He always called him Cluney. It was after some famous Scotch person, I think.

The customer's first narrative greatly amused Ralph R. because he had not heard it before. He knew of his grandfather's strong political convictions as did everyone who remembers Ralph E. The humour in this story is Ralph E.'s ability to deliver a sharp witty retort even during the earthquake, and especially the fact that he delivered this retort to the minister.

Osgood is not remembered as much for his retorts as for his antics as a young man. He was a very sociable young fellow and loved to have a good time. Having one of the first automobiles in the Valley, one can be sure he did drive fast and did show off. Such speediness would certainly draw comments from

other Valley inhabitants but would not at all upset Osgood.

The name 'Clune-Ralph' evolved from the habit in Margaree Valley of calling the sons or daughters after their fathers in order to distinguish them, i.e. Osgood Ralph (here known as Clune), Viola Ralph. Wives are also subject to this naming practice; they have their Christian name hyphenated with their husband's Christian name as part of the Margaree Valley naming tradition. This pattern of hyphenating names with those of the father or husband enables the residents of the Valley to trace ancestors for at least one generation.

Ralph R. was a captive audience for the customer's narratives. He enjoyed hearing such stories and would probably repeat them at a later date to other family members. Ralph R. is both a discreet listener and teller of stories. When he listens, he asks questions that encourage the narrator to disclose more information--information he probably already holds. He does this to obtain new versions of these narratives. As a narrator, Ralph R. is selective. He only tells stories to people he knows will appreciate

them." Due to such discretion his stories are always appreciated by his selected audience.

On Thursday, March 4, 1982, Ralph R. was telling stories. He was next to the meat counter with his good friends Bill and Elaine. Ralph R. was narrating for a purpose. It was the night after his father's [Osgood's] funeral. All day long people had been coming into the store to stand around and talk about Osgood. It was a last requiem for a very significant Margaree Valley native. Throughout the day Ralph R. talked and listened to everyone who came in as they reminisced about his father. There had not been much business carried out during the day--the day was in fact like an extension of the wake. At six o'clock that evening the store was empty except for Ralph R., Bill, Elaine, and the author who was filling the position of cashier. Not surprisingly, the conversation drifted towards memories of Osgood and how he was the last 'old-time' Valley merchant. Since Bill and Elaine are not native to the Valley, Ralph began telling stories about another old general store merchant, Arthur, who had passed away only a few months previous to Osgood.

Arthur used to love to play jokes. One time there was a rather slow fellow that worked on one of Robin's trucks [a local wholesale distributor]. They would be delivering at Arthur's and he [Arthur] would be buying feed [for animals] from them. This young fellow came into the store one day carrying a 100 pound sack. He said to Arthur, 'Where will I put this?' Arthur said, 'Down back, and up the stairs.' Of course there were no stairs in the store so this young man walked around the store for about ten minutes, carrying the sack, before Arthur told him where he actually wanted the sack placed.

Arthur owned and operated a general store on the west side of the Margaree River, almost directly opposite the MacPherson's store. In order to make his enterprise more prosperous he was involved in other business sidelines; he sold many varieties of animal feed, owned the local ambulance, and was the community undertaker. Arthur was a practical joker and was also considered to be a witty man.

Bill and Elaine enjoyed this story and Ralph R.'s presentation of it. Bill commented that he had heard such stories about Arthur from other people. Bill was especially interested in the Arthur stories since he had purchased Arthur's family's old farmstead, in Margaree Valley, a few years previously. The interest that Bill showed encouraged Ralph R. to tell another

Arthur story.

Oh, the stories they tell about Arthur are pretty funny. He was quite the joker. He'd say anything. His store was on the side of the river, across from here. In addition to being a merchant, he was the local undertaker. People have some great stories about that. Anyway, one day the minister's wife came into Arthur's store and asked for some bologna. Arthur turned to Sheldon [his helper] and said, 'Sheldon, go down to the morgue and get my knife.' [meaning he kept his meat knife in the morgue]:

Depending on who is narrating this story, the name of the customer will change. Sometimes the actual name of the minister's wife is used but since Bill and Elaine are not familiar with all the local people they would not recognize the name. Sometimes the customer becomes an American tourist, or one of the more particular ladies of the Valley. Sheldon, Arthur's helper in the store is here represented as a young boy so that the story will seem more believable. Ralph and Bill laugh about this story but Elaine simply looks at them skeptically. Ralph R. goes on to tell another story about bologna:

Peter Boudreau was this fellow who used to have pulp trucks on the mountain [these trucks were hauling pulp to the mill in Port Hawkesbury]. He had Jimmy and John working for him. Now Peter is a Frenchman. He'd come to the store with a list of goods to

buy. He would always holler from one end of the store to the other, 'Where's this or where do you find that?' Anyway he wanted bologna,, which he called bolognix. So he hol|ered to me, I was down cutting meat, 'Ralph, cut me some bolognix.' I said, 'How much, Peter?' and he measured with his hands about six inches. 'Oh, about this much,' he said. Then he turned to me and said, 'Myself, I would rather eat shit but Jimmy and John, they love it!' The best part of the story is that there were two elderly American ladies standing at the meat counter waiting for me to finish Arthur's order. They were Mrs. Howe and Mrs. Fisher. Mrs. Fisher turned to me and in a disgusted tone said, 'Ralph, WHO is that man?'

Ralph respects Peter Boudreau as a fellow businessman. He also thinks that Peter is very comical. He laughs at Peter's accent, the way he combines words, his bluntness, and his indifference to rules of social conduct. In order to fully appreciate this narrative one should be familiar with all of the characters. Bill and Elaine are not. However, they enjoy seeing Ralph laugh at a story he thinks is so funny.

Peter's reference to the eating preferences of his workers reflect his aggravation at having to shop for two men with huge appetites. The natives of Margaree would be very familiar with the stories associated with the appetites of these two brothers.

Ralph R.'s use of the two American ladies and their evident shock after hearing Peter speak would be particularly funny to the local people. Both of these ladies were well known summer visitors to the Valley. They came to the Valley every summer for many, many years but they were exclusive in choosing with whom they would socialize. Having someone as crude as Peter bursting into a store demanding attention was not something they were accustomed to dealing with. Knowing this, Ralph R. enjoyed Peter's visit even more.

C. News

When people go to the store in Margaree Valley, they expect to hear some news. They know that the people in the store are 'up' on the current happenings in the community and they want to hear about them. The store provides them with the opportunity to see or hear about a neighbour and serves as a forum for the news of the day. Topics open for discussion may include: car accidents, church, visitors to the area, wakes, funerals and births. It is important not only

to hear the local news, but to talk about it as well.

Weather conditions and forecasts are the most common topics discussed in the store. This information may be presented under the guise of a superficial conversation starter, or it may be the primary topic. After the usual 'what's new,' most people entering the store typically make a comment about the weather:

CLERK: Hello. How are you today?

CUSTOMER: Oh, not too bad. And you?

CLERK: Pretty good. I'd be better if the rain would stop.

CUSTOMER: My goodness, yes! Haven't we had a lot of it? And it's so cold. I don't know if we'll ever see summer.

CLERK: 'Seems that way doesn't it?

At this point a new subject is sometimes introduced and the conversation progresses along a different line. Often, when the weather conditions are extraordinarily good or bad, the tone of the conversation is of a reminiscent nature as people try to recall similar weather variations.

Long range forecasts and the daily weather

reports are important to the entire community of
Margaree Valley. Weather determines the working
conditions and therefore most people comment on it.
When people reflect upon similar storms or droughts in
the past, they are often trying to reassure themselves
that things will get better:

CUSTOMER: Boy! Isn't this weather unbelievable!!

CLERK: It sure is. We haven't had snow like this
since 1968.

CUSTOMER: Was that the time the roads were closed?

CLERK: Yes! My! That was a hard winter all right! I
remember we had to take groceries to Big Intervale on
the ski-doo. Those people were snowed in for two
weeks.

CUSTOMER: A couple of people died that time, didn't
they?

CLERK: Yeah. And Dr. Bernie had to come down from
Inverness and we had to take him around on the ski-doo
to the houses. Yeah, that was a bad winter all right.
Then, the next year there wasn't much snow at all.

When weather conditions become the main topic of
discussion in the store, it is usually because
something out of the ordinary has happened. Sudden
snow storms, flooding or severe electrical storms, are
all reasons for discussion. These

conversations often take place early in the morning after a night of unexpected weather changes:

RALPH: Heard they got a lot of snow around Truro last night.

CUSTOMER: I heard that on the six o'clock news. I don't think they were ready for that.

RALPH: No, I don't imagine. It wasn't forecast either. When the breadman was in this morning he said the road was closed for a while.


CUSTOMER: Were there any cars off the road?

RALPH: Well, he didn't say but the truck he meets every morning at the Buckwheat was late because of the road [conditions].

CUSTOMER: What did he say about the road between here and the Trans-Canada?

RALPH: Said they were tricky out around the Lakes but that's not unusual for this time of year....

This type of local road and weather report is passed along every winter morning from MacPherson's Store. The Breadman, the first outside person to arrive in the Valley four mornings a week, always brings with him the most up-to-date road report. Since he meets another transport truck at the junction of the Trans-Canada Highway and Route 19 to Margaree Valley, his information is accurate. The merchant



passes all this news along to all the people that ask and they in turn share it with others. Often these reports are accompanied by news of accidents, cars off the road or heroic feats of drivers that have narrowly escaped accidents due to highway conditions. If a story such as this is particularly interesting, the men will stay in the store longer, both listening and telling it to others.

Discussions of accidents are common in the store and they always involve people going to great lengths to give their opinions on how the accident happened or how it could have been prevented. MacPherson's Store is both a good place to discuss such a topic and to hear more details about the event. Since Ralph R. is the local Volunteer Fire Department chief and the merchant, people know that the clerks at MacPherson's will have the most current reports on any calamities in the Valley. If community members cannot get to the store to hear these reports first-hand, they do not hesitate to call for information. A typical telephone conversation would sound like this:

SHERRY: Hello.

CALLER: Sherry, did the ambulance pass the store?

SHERRY: Yes, it just went by.

CALLER: Who was in it? Was it Helen? Did it come from Big Intervale?

SHERRY: No-o-o-o. I don't think it was Helen. It was someone from Russell's, I think. At least that was the car that was following it. Must have been old Fred. I heard he wasn't well.

CALLER: That's right. I heard he was pretty slack last night. Pearl had to go up in the middle of the night. I'm surprised they waited so long to take him in.

SHERRY: I don't know why they waited either unless he got worse after Pearl went home. I saw her go by about eight o'clock this morning.

CALLER: Probably the poor old fellow didn't want to go in again. Well, maybe I'll call Pearl after a while when she gets up. She's been working nights all week, so I imagine that she's still sleeping. Well, if you hear anything else give me a ring.

Whenever there is a new face in the community or if someone returns after being away for awhile, the fact always makes the news circuit at MacPherson's. Strangers in the Valley are always observed carefully. Even if they do not disclose any information regarding why they are in the area, people surmise reasons from their observations.

If a car pulls up to the gas tanks and a clerk

goes out to serve gas, he will make leading conversation and will try to form an opinion about the strangers:

ROBERT: Can I help you?

CUSTOMER: Yes, fill it up please.

ROBERT: Lovely day, isn't it?

CUSTOMER: Yes, it is pretty, isn't it?

ROBERT: Have you been here before?

CUSTOMER: No. This is our first time here. I'm surprised we ever got here. We got lost about three times this morning.

ROBERT: Yeah. It's kinda hard to find your way around if you're not used to it. Just don't be scared to ask for direction.

CUSTOMER: Oh, we asked when we left the Normaway this morning but we still managed to get lost. It's a nice place to be lost in though. Can you suggest a good place to have lunch around the area?

ROBERT: Well, what direction are you heading?

CUSTOMER: We're heading around the Cabot Trail. I guess we should go out to the highway and then turn left...

ROBERT: Oh, no! Don't go that way! You should go around the other way and then you won't always be turning around to see the view. We always go the Cheticamp way. Just stay on this road and when you get to Margaree Harbour hang to your right and cross over a long wooden bridge. Just keep driving...

CUSTOMER: And is that the way to the Cabot Trail?

ROBERT: Oh yes. By the time you drive out of this little section you're on the Trail road.

CUSTOMER: Oh, thank you for telling us that. Now what do we owe you for the gas?

ROBERT: Twenty-four, twenty.

CUSTOMER: And where did you say was a place for lunch?

ROBERT: Well, if I were you, I'd wait until I got to Cheticamp and I'd eat at the Harbour Restaurant or at Laurie's Motel. It's just before the Park. You can't miss either one of them. Cheticamp isn't that big.

CUSTOMER: Thank you very much. You've been very helpful.

ROBERT: Enjoy your day on the Trail.

CUSTOMER: I'm sure we will. Bye.

When Robert comes into the store with the money from the gas, he will be able to tell the cashier or anyone else who is interested all about the people that he just served at the pumps. They were an older couple, from New York, it was their first time in the area, they spent the night at the local Normaway Inn, and got lost when they tried to drive around the Valley that morning, and they were on their way around the Cabot Trail. In the course of a conversation like this one it is common for the tourists to remark about how and why they came to visit the area. Often they

are interested in finding out how to locate a particular family in the area. Most tourists do not mind answering polite questions or even asking more of their own. They do not realize that, after they have left, they become the subject of talk in the store. If these same people were to return two days, a month or even a year later, Robert would remember them. New faces are always remembered in Margaree.

When a long-time resident of the Valley has moved away and returns on a visit, they are also discussed in the store:

HAROLD: Guess who's in town? Have you seen Aunt Esther?

CUSTOMER: Yes, I have. I was just up there.

HAROLD: Who did she say was coming? Mary?

CUSTOMER: No, she said Betty would be down next week but that Mary doesn't know if she will be able to get away this year or not.

HAROLD: Why is that?

CUSTOMER: Well, I guess they're busy at work, and one of her kids is getting married, and it's going to be a busy summer for her.

HAROLD: How does Aunt Esther look?

CUSTOMER: Great, just great. She said she had a good winter, no sickness to speak of.

HAROLD: Well, that's good to hear. Is she all set up at the house? Does she need anything?

CUSTOMER: I don't think so. I told her I'd call her later on so if there's anything I'll let you know. Maybe you could stop in on your way up tonight....

HAROLD: Okay, okay, just let me know.¹⁰

Information concerning seasonal inhabitants of the Valley is passed on to anyone interested. Once Harold has established all of the facts relating to Aunt Esther's arrival, he will be anxious to share that information with others.

News stories that do not directly involve Margaree Valley are also topics discussed in the store. Favourite news items to discuss are those pertaining to Cape Breton, but people are also eager to talk about national or international events. The sources for this information are television, radio and the newspapers. Margaree people are definitely interested in outside news and they often try to relate it to events happening in their own lives.

In the winter of 1982 there was an earthquake in northern New Brunswick. The occurrence of such a natural phenomenon so close to Margaree Valley sparked

many conversations in the store:

CUSTOMER 1: That was quite the thing now wasn't it...
an earth-quake in New Brunswick.

RALPH: Yes, it must have been quite a surprise all
right,

CUSTOMER 2: I'll bet there were a few surprised and
scared people in New Brunswick.

CUSTOMER 1: I'll bet there was.

RALPH: There wasn't much damage though, was there?

CUSTOMER 1: Well, now I don't know. Some are sayin' a
few houses were shook up pretty bad. But I don't know
how much truth is in that.

CUSTOMER 2: I heard that too. Heard the road was torn
up too. It's bad enough when the frost settles into
them roads in New Brunswick, they don't need no
earthquake to make them worse!

CUSTOMER 1: Suppose the next thing you know we'll be
havin' one here. I didn't think we'd have them things
around here.

RALPH: You'll have to pack up and move away, Donald.

CUSTOMER 1: It'll take more than that to move me!

The discussion pertaining to the earthquake took
place over in the potato zone. This is the public
forum for airing opinions. Each opinion is given
careful consideration and then is either supported or
refuted by the other members of the group. There was a

strong element of surprise evident in this conversation about the earthquake which is not usually so clear in talk of this kind.

Such a discussion can go on for an hour or more depending on how much information each of the participants has to disclose. These exchanges gain added colour when one of the members has had communication with someone closely associated with the disaster or accident. By establishing that one has this contact, one's opinions and descriptions gain validity.

When the Ocean Ranger drilling rig sank off the coast of Newfoundland in 1982 the author was conducting fieldwork in Margaree Valley. Everyone who frequents MacPherson's Store knew that the author was living and going to school in Newfoundland. Therefore, these regulars expected the author to have more information concerning the disaster than the news reports were giving them. When it became common knowledge that the author had had a friend on the oil rig, the inquiries became more discreet but they gained in intensity:

CUSTOMER: That must have been an awful shock to the people in Newfoundland when that rig sank.

NATALIE: Yes, I guess it was.

CUSTOMER: They said the whole city was shut down in that storm.

NATALIE: Apparently it was. They've had a bad winter.

CUSTOMER: I suppose all of those men were young, were they?

NATALIE: Most of them were young men, in their twenties or thirties, around my age, I guess.

CUSTOMER: I saw an interview with some of the families. Some of those poor souls believe that there are survivors... it's sad.

NATALIE: It's very sad. I only wish there were some survivors.

CUSTOMER: When are you going back? Have you talked to any of your friends?

NATALIE: I'll be going back the end of this month. I'm sure this bad weather will be over by then. I don't know much more about the whole thing than you do... no one does.

CUSTOMER: I just thought...well, seeing as you know lots of people, that maybe you'd heard...

NATALIE: No, no I haven't heard anything. I saw the names in the paper, that's all.

CUSTOMER: Was your friend there? I mean, I heard you knew someone...

NATALIE: Yes.

CUSTOMER: Well, I'm sorry, very sorry...

The author's exchange with this customer exemplifies the many such conversations pertaining to the Ocean Ranger that were carried on in the store that winter. Although the manner of the inquisitor is rather abrupt, she is trying to find a way to admit knowledge of the author's association with a person involved in the accident. She wants to express sympathy without offending the other individual. Since the details of the relationship are unknown in the Valley, the customer feels she must skirt the issue until she thinks it is appropriate to offer condolences.

There is no funeral parlour in Margaree Valley, therefore the tradition of having wakes in the homes prevails. Wakes are usually held for one evening and an entire day, with the funeral in the afternoon of the third day. News of the wake is passed along by word of mouth and on the radio. Many people go into the store to find out the details pertaining to the wake and the funeral. Often after visiting the home of the deceased, the friends that have travelled a distance to come to the wake will stop at MacPherson's Store. Stopping at the store provides an opportunity

to meet with others outside the immediate family and the home in which the wake is being held. By talking and sharing memories in MacPherson's Store, these people are adjusting to the loss of a loved one. It makes everyone feel better when memories of happier times are shared:

CUSTOMER 1: Well, Harry is gone.

SHERRY: Yes. Were you up yet?

CUSTOMER 1: We just came from there.

CUSTOMER 2: Have you been up yet, Sherry?

SHERRY: No, I haven't been able to get away from here yet. I'll probably go tonight after the store closes.

CUSTOMER 1: Gosh, there were a lot of people around.

CUSTOMER 2: All of his sisters are home from the States. I don't know when they arrived. I didn't have a chance to talk to anyone. You know Harry and I worked together in Sydney?

SHERRY: You did?

CUSTOMER 2: Back in the forties.... I was trucking out of Sydney and he come down there lookin' for a job. 'Course he was just a young fellow and had no trainin' on trucks. But I told the guy in the office that I knew him and knew his family. So Patterson, that was the owner, he put him in with me for three weeks to train.

SHERRY: I never knew he even drove a truck. He couldn't have done it for long..

CUSTOMER 2: No, I don't suppose. Well that would be before your time anyway. He probably drove for five or six years.

CUSTOMER 1: We often talk about them days. I kept on drivin' and Harry got into the fisheries. Guess there's no guarantee 'bout how long you work or where you work, you're gonna go sometime.

SHERRY: Yes, that's the truth for sure. It's too bad that he just retired.

CUSTOMER 2: Yes, isn't it. Are Lena and Ralph around?

SHERRY: Yes, they're in the house. Go on in and have a cup of tea. They're both in there.

CUSTOMER 1: It was nice to see you, Sherry.

SHERRY: You too. Maybe I'll have a chance to run in before you go...

CUSTOMER 2: Okay. Bye now.

The death of a community member is felt throughout the entire Valley. When someone dies the community responds with offers of assistance. Services provided are meals for the family, food to be served at the wake, and any transportation requirements for the immediate family or for out-of-town relatives. In this way the entire community expresses sympathy to the family over the loss. After the wake and the funeral, the death is not openly discussed between family and non-family

members. Both parties continue to express their sorrow among themselves. When a family member comes into the store after a death has occurred, the question 'How are you?' can mean more than the obvious:

LENA: So, how are you today?

CUSTOMER: Oh, not too bad. But I've been better.

LENA: Things are getting back to normal for you, are they?

CUSTOMER: Yes, but I've been having some rough days.

LENA: Everyone has those though. And time is a great healer you know.

CUSTOMER: Yes, I know that but it's lonesome and now that the kids have all gone back I find the time long.

LENA: But I suppose the girls call a lot, do they?

CUSTOMER: Oh yes, Margaret calls twice a week and Diane sometimes more than that. I told her that she'll never be able to come home again if she doesn't stop calling.

LENA: Oh, I know how that is. My girls call home a lot too. I guess they need to talk to us as much as we like to hear from them. That's a good sign anyway...

CUSTOMER: True, true...

Lena does not directly ask her about the death but she expresses concern for the widow. The content

of the conversation is determined by the customer. She wants reassurance and Lena offers her that in a very sympathetic manner. The customer needs this support to ease her re-emergence into the community. This visit to the store and chat with the cashier is a bright spot in an otherwise dark day for the widow. The first visit is the most difficult, but now she knows that she can go to the store and talk about her husband to the cashier, and that makes her feel better.

Genuine sympathy is extended by everyone to everyone in the community. Margaree people are very empathetic and the clerks at MacPherson's are no exception. People who frequent the store expect to receive sympathy for the following reasons: death, health problems and hospitalization.

A customer comes into the store to pay for gasoline he has just put into his truck. He pauses, after paying, to talk to Sherry:

CUSTOMER: Well, I won't be around for awhile, I suppose.

SHERRY: Why not? Did you get the results of those tests?

CUSTOMER: Yeah. The hospital called and I have to go in on Tuesday. Guess I'll be having my gall bladder out.

SHERRY: Oh, that's not a bad operation. I had mine out ten years ago and I haven't had a sick day since.

CUSTOMER: Oh, so it's not too bad, is it? I was sort of worried about it.

SHERRY: Oh, don't worry. You'll only be in a week or so and then you'll have to take it easy for awhile. So, it's Tuesday you go is it?

CUSTOMER: Yeah.... But I'll probably be around again before that.

Like many customers, this one has come into the store both to pay for his gas, and share his news with the cashier. In return he expects to receive sympathy and reassurance. By making an announcement in the store about his impending hospitalization, he will be sure to receive not only a card from Sherry, but from the other community members that frequent the store and who inquire about the welfare of other neighbours. The purpose in telling any clerk at MacPherson's about going into the hospital, is to generate sympathy. Any customer who comes in and who knows this customer and asks the proverbial 'What's new?' will learn about his hospitalization:

CUSTOMER: What's new?

SHERRY: Not much. Suppose you knew that Jimmy was going into the hospital, did you?

CUSTOMER: Well, I knew he was up for tests. What did he find out?

SHERRY: He has to go in on Tuesday to have his gall bladder out.

CUSTOMER: Oh, well that's not too bad. I don't think that's a bad operation, is it?

SHERRY: No! I was telling him that I had mine out ten years ago and that I haven't had a sick day since.

CUSTOMER: Well, isn't that great! I must be sure and send him a little card.

Another demand for the sympathetic ear is when customers talk about the health problems of someone else in their family. This is an example of the sort of conversation resulting from the clerks' knowledge that there is sickness in the family:

LENA: How's your father?

CUSTOMER: Well he's not that good. We had to take him up to the hospital again last night.

LENA: Gosh, he's been back and forth a lot, hasn't he?

CUSTOMER: Yes, yes he has. It's hard on him and it's hard on Mom. She wants to sit with him all day and he wants her there. I just hope all of this running back

and forth doesn't put her in the hospital.

LENA: Do you think he'll be in for long this time?

CUSTOMER: We don't know any more. He's eighty-five and the doctors don't think they can do much more.

LENA: He's eighty-five! My goodness I didn't realize that he was that old. Well he's been healthy near all his life so I guess we can't expect to get by scot-free all the time.

CUSTOMER: No. That's right.

Lena expresses the basic concern that is felt by the entire community. Although this is a long standing health problem, Lena asks about the customer's father to show her continuing sympathy and support for him and his family. By continuing to ask about this man's health, she may discover that there has been a change in his condition, but most importantly, she shows the customer that she understands and is sympathetic. However, sometimes such freely offered sympathy is actually abused. As a result, the cashier is not always so sympathetic.

Often, when a female customer comes to the store for gas she will pull up to the tanks, come into the store, and talk while waiting for a clerk to fill her gas tank. While she is awaiting the total purchase

price, she will converse with the cashier, often about her health:

CUSTOMER: Nice to see the sun again, isn't it?

LENA: It sure is. We've had enough snow for a while.

CUSTOMER: Lena, I don't suppose you'd let me get some gas until Monday? Steve and I want to take our income tax down to H & R Block in Sydney. I know we're gettin' a couple of hundred dollars back and we need it to buy a few things, and I've got to get some X-rays. Really, I only need thirty dollars worth of gas and I promise that I will be in on Monday to pay for it.

LENA: Well, I suppose. But if it's not paid on Monday, there'll be no more credit.

CUSTOMER: No, I'll be in on Monday. I mean, me or Steve will be in.

LENA: Okay. Robert, would you go and give (the customer) thirty dollars worth of gas?

CUSTOMER: You know, last week I had to go to Sydney to see a doctor and the travelling was really bad. We didn't know if we'd make it over Kelly's Mountain.

LENA: Yes, last week was bad, wasn't it?

CUSTOMER: I was so worried. You know I have a bad leg and I was scared Steve and I would get stuck and we'd have to walk somewhere for help.

LENA: M-m-m-m-huh.

CUSTOMER: Well, I fell last winter on the ice. Oh, it was bad. Steve had to come out and help me in the house. I was laid up for three weeks, you know.

LENA: M-m-m-m-m-huh.

CUSTOMER: Here I was, my leg up on the couch and Steve had to do everything for me. It was nice to be waited on though. Now I suppose the doctor in Sydney will fix me up and Steve will never wait on me again. He's really good like that you know. Now when he had his back operation I had to do the same for him. He's going to Sydney to see a specialist next week....

The customer has entered the store with an express purpose in mind. She has come to ask for credit and she has every intention of getting credit. She tries to justify the request by stating she will have money in three days and that she needs the fuel to go to a doctor. In her mind, she is not asking for credit, which she knows is against Lena's business policy; she is instead asking for a short term loan. In Lena's mind there is no difference because she knows that the lady's credit standing is not good. However, in the customer's mind, there is enough difference between credit and loan to give her the courage to ask Lena for gas when she has no money. Although Lena agrees to this credit purchase, she does not approve of it. By being curt with her responses to the attempts at conversation, Lena is trying to make the atmosphere uncomfortable for the customer so that she will not want to ask for credit at a future date. The customer

senses this disapproval and feels guilty. To alleviate this guilt, she in turn tries to generate Lena's sympathy through not only her own general health problems but her husband's as well. Lena is not particularly interested in the details of these health problems, nor does she want to make it easy for the customer to justify her credit purchase. By not responding to the lulls in conversation, Lena maintains her strong disapproval of credit in the store.

The previous two examples, while illustrating examples of the disclosure of personal news, also illustrate the use and abuse of the 'sympathetic ear' found in the general store. In both examples Lena was the listener, but her responses differed greatly. In the first instance she offered genuine interest and concern while in the second she withheld both her interest and her sympathy. Lena uses discretion when doling out sympathy.

Having previously established the context in which social interaction occurs, and the patterns of socializing in MacPherson's store, I have concentrated in this chapter, on the content of talk and narrative

found in the store. Talk is continuous in MacPherson's store. Talk can range from a simple greeting to a complex discussion. It is important to note that several variables determine the extent and diversification of talk. These variables are: who is present, who will listen, the time of day, and the subject being discussed. The frequency of talk in MacPherson's store is also influenced by the economic situation. Employment is seasonal in Margaree Valley therefore there is more time to talk during the winter months than during other seasons of the year.

In my study, three categories of talk emerged: conversation, stories, and news. Conversation is an exchange of personal information pertinent to the immediate environment. Stories are personal narratives, humorous narratives, or both. News may be any topic deemed worthy of discussion that is recent or unusual.

This examination of the content of talk and narrative reaffirmed the vital role that MacPherson's store plays in the socializing routines of the Margaree Valley people. Community members rely on the

store as a place to engage in general conversation, as a setting in which to hear and tell stories, and as a forum for discussing news.

NOTES: CHAPTER VI

¹ Lawrence G. Small, "The Interrelationship of Work and Talk in a Newfoundland Fishing Community," Diss. University of Pennsylvania 1979, p.83.

² March 11, 1982. Fieldwork Notebook.

³ William Labov and Joshua Waletzky, "Narrative Analyses: Oral Versions of Personal Experience," in Essays on the Visual and Verbal Arts, Ed. June Helm (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967), pp. 12-44. For an interpretation and re-evaluation of the Labov/Waletzky paper see John A. Robinson, "Personal Narratives Reconsidered," Journal of American Folklore, 94, No.371(1981), 58-85.

⁴ Robinson, p. 63.

⁵ Robinson, p. 64.

⁶ Osgood MacPherson, October 1980.

⁷ Marilyn MacPherson, 15 January, 1985.

⁸ Lena MacPherson, March 1982.

9 March 2, 1982. Fieldnotes.

10 March 2, 1982. Fieldnotes.

CONCLUSION

When I began to formulate conclusions about this research, I was drawn again to the Tallman quotation:

The only tradition or traditions against which the storyteller can be evaluated are those which have nurtured him and which he, in turn, has nurtured by his own active or passive participation.¹

While I had wanted to focus on an individual storyteller, Osgood MacPherson, I could not ignore the environment in which his skill as a narrator developed. Therefore, I felt it necessary to provide a detailed physical description of the store, and the shopping and socializing patterns found therein.

It became apparent as my research progressed that had I not been familiar with the traditions and habits of the people, and in fact a native of Margaree Valley, I would never have achieved the degree of intimacy necessary to collect the information upon

which this thesis is based. Hence, in addition to studying the talk, narrative, and social interaction in Margaree Valley, I have attempted to provide a portrait of the Margaree people and an idea of some of the attitudes and values held by these people.

The people of Margaree Valley are, in general, contented with their way of life in a semi-isolated and very traditional area of Cape Breton Island. They believe strongly in the adage that, 'what was good enough for my father, is good enough for me.' As a result of this attitude the population in Margaree Valley is quite static--it is exceptional rather than normal for a native to permanently leave the Valley. It has been noted that as folklore is transmitted from one generation to another, so also are the traditional attitudes...even if they are not always formally articulated." 2

Some of the traditional attitudes transmitted in Margaree Valley are demonstrated in this thesis. For example, male and female divisions of labour are very distinct. This was discussed in the shopping patterns of the List Shopper and Team Work Shoppers. In each case, the males demonstrated the attitude that

shopping is a woman's work. The List Shopper does this by hovering uncomfortably around the check-out counter, or in the centre of the store, holding his list and looking bewildered until Sherry or one of the other clerks come to his aid. It does not matter to the List Shopper that his wife may be waiting impatiently for the items on the list, or that the clerks may be very busy; shopping is not his chore and so he does not do it.

The Team Work shoppers work better together as a unit than the List Shopper and the clerk; however, their roles are also very distinct. The Team members work this way: he drives, she is the passenger; he socializes, she shops; he pays, she stands patiently by his side; they leave. That routine seldom changes.

Margaree people are also very conscious of being neighbourly. One of the duties of being a good neighbour is concern about others' welfare. From some people this concern may be considered unwanted curiosity while from others it is viewed as interest and good neighbourliness. In some instances, the staff at MacPherson's store are being nosey when they enquire, 'How are you today?', 'So what's happening

out your way?' or other innocuous greetings. However, if these questions were not asked, people would be insulted and think that no one cared. The responses to such greetings are totally voluntary, therefore the customers themselves determine the extent of information that will be circulated as Valley 'news'.

Awareness of Valley 'news' is an extension of good neighbourliness. People go to MacPherson's store to shop but they also go there to find out what is 'new' in the community. MacPherson's store is a disseminating point for Margaree 'news'. While shopping, or after visiting MacPherson's store, people will be aware of who is in the hospital, the current physical conditions of those who are sick, when the next baby shower will be held, how many salmon were caught, etc. While such information may seem inconsequential to daily living, Margaree people would see such 'news' as vital to their interaction within the community.

Throughout this thesis I tried to understand why the storytelling tradition in MacPherson's store changed but remains an integral part of socializing in Margaree Valley. My research leads me to form two

major conclusions about the reasons for this change in the storytelling tradition.

Firstly, the merchants themselves brought about a change in the actual storytelling. Ralph E. preferred the bustling activity of his blacksmith forge to the general store and to listen to stories being told rather than participate in them. In fact, throughout the research I conducted, I could not find evidence that Ralph E. was a narrator. I have collected stories about him, and references to the storytelling tradition that was part of his era, but not stories actually told by him. Osgood was a storyteller. He loved to work in the store and for him storytelling was almost a requirement for being a merchant. It is important to note that in Margaree Valley, Osgood was also known as a storyteller. He was very aware of current events and of life outside the Valley; his travelling experiences provided him with subjects of interest to talk about--places he had been and people he had met.

The present merchant, Ralph R. MacPherson seems to be following in the footsteps of his grandfather, Ralph E. Ralph R. is not as much a storyteller as he

is a story initiator. He encourages storytelling, when he is present in the store, but his business interests are much more varied and he is seldom there. Ralph R. may become more of a storyteller as he ages but when the fieldwork for this thesis was done, the store was in a state of flux, and the new merchant was just taking over. Therefore conclusions about the present merchant at MacPherson's general store are very speculative.

Another probable reason for changes in the talking and narrative traditions were the physical changes that occurred in the store. I would conclude that the removal of the pot-belly stove in 1959 signalled the end of the conceptual centre-stage, and also the awareness of performance routines associated with narrative events in MacPherson's store. After the stove was removed, the room was divided by shelves which in turn created aisles and separate socializing zones. The zones were described in detail in Chapter V.

The change in the context for social interaction also signalled a change in the content of the talk and narratives carried out in MacPherson's store.

Although some references to the storytelling tradition in general stores suggest that it is diminishing, I believe that this tradition continues to exist but is adapting and adjusting to changes in the immediate environment. Storytelling in MacPherson's store is an example of this adaptation and adjustment. This adaptation of a tradition within the general store can be viewed as a necessity for survival, just as the MacPherson merchants were forced to be both versatile and flexible in order to survive as merchants.

In addition, there seems to be a need for continuity and permanence in the people of Margaree Valley. MacPherson's store has been a permanent fixture in this environment since 1909. Although there have been changes in the physical appearance of the store, the actual services offered, and merchants who run the store, MacPherson's general store remains. The quality of merchandise and the service is consistent, the hours are regular, and most important, the welcoming atmosphere has not changed. Certainly there have been changes in the patterns of life in Margaree Valley since the first MacPherson merchant opened a store; however, these changes have not

contributed to diminishing the ongoing role that MacPherson's general store plays in providing a central socializing environment.

In conclusion I wish to say that the storytelling tradition remains strong in Margaree Valley. There have, however, been changes in this tradition. Where once the narratives were lengthy and detailed, and were most frequently told by older community members to the younger generation, that is no longer the case. The content and style of these narratives have changed but the context, MacPherson's store, has remained the same. The older Margaree people are not telling lengthy narratives as a form of entertainment or for instructional purposes, but they are telling stories by incorporating them into daily conversation. Hence, the tradition of storytelling is not dying in Margaree Valley--it is simply changing. And, the common element which unifies this discussion of talk, narrative and socializing patterns is MacPherson's general store.

NOTES: CHAPTER VII

¹ Richard Sensor Tallman, "The TaPl Tale Tradition and the Teller: A Biographical-Contextual Study of a Storyteller, Robert Coffil of Blomidon, Nova Scotia." Diss. Memorial University of Newfoundland 1974, p. 37.

² Alan Dundes, Analytic Essays in Folklore. (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), p. 14.

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