

THE CORNER GROCERY IS ALIVE AND WELL ON LEE STREET

By Karen Farrar

Once upon a time, hand-pushed carts bearing ice cream treats, sandwiches and other goodies made regular trips through Campus living areas, announcing their presence with tinkling bells.

As everyone knows, students, like all young persons, get hungry — often.

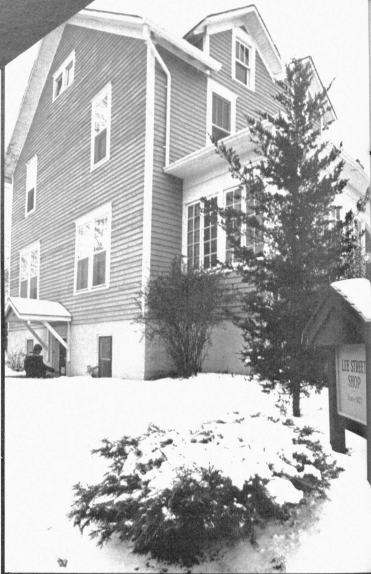
So, when, in 1927, Charles Gilbert opened a small neighborhood grocery on a street surrounded by fraternity houses and student rooms, it wasn't surprising that the store should become a popular student grocery/snack shop.

Now, after 50 years, Lee Street Shop business is still going strong, at a time when small neighborhood stores are mostly a pleasant memory for those lucky enough to have lived near one.

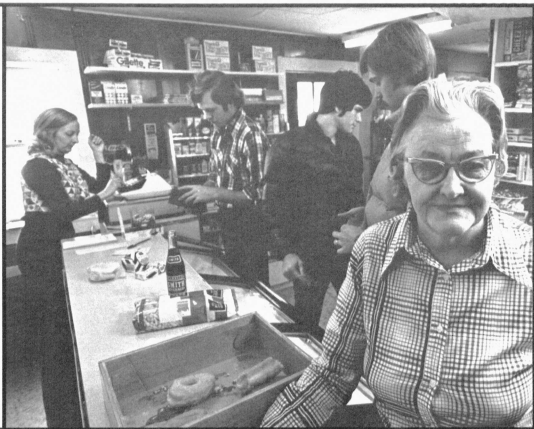
The shop is located on the eastern edge of Campus, a block off College Avenue, in the basement of a green-shingled house divided into student apartments above. It is tiny — with only 390 square feet of floor space — and when you go in your first inclination is to look around corners to try to find the rest of it.

But, in typical neighborhood-store fashion, a lot is crammed into the small space. With a little searching, most "emergency" items — like mouth wash, laundry detergent and cough drops — can be found. And, unless you're thinking gourmet that night, you can carry home provisions for a decent meal from a stock of canned goods, baking supplies, TV dinners and pot pies, and even potatoes, onions, lettuce and tomatoes by the pound.

Biggest attraction, though, and surprisingly cheap, is the sandwich section. Pick from a menu of nine different cold sandwiches, including corned beef, salami, liver cheese, tuna and ham (priced from 40 to 60 cents); or a hot roast beef or submarine-type "Poor Boy" for 80 cents; or the favorite "Juicy Berger," better known as "Sloppy Joe," for just 45 cents. And if you'd like a switch in bev-



Proprietor Millie Rathert continues the 50-year tradition of serving Mizzou students at the small, basement store near Campus.



SANDWICHES		SANDWICHES	
POOR BOY	80¢	JUICY BURGER	45¢
HAM	60	LIVER CHEESE	43
CORNED BEEF	80	BOLOGNA	40
PICKLE LOAF	50	SPICE LOAF	40
SALAMI	50	CHEESE	40
TUNA	50		
		EXTRA	
		RYE	5¢
		TOMATO	10¢
		CHEESE	12¢
HOT ROAST BEEF	80¢ + 11AM - 1PM		

erage from the customary soda pop, orange and vegetable juices and milk are available in individual-size servings.

For really light snackers, there are hard-boiled eggs for 12 cents, yogurt and delivered-fresh-daily bakery rolls. And, in the good-old-days tradition, open jars filled with candies and bubble gum offer treats for two cents (and even some still for a penny).

Millie Rathert, who has run the Lee Street Shop since 1964, explains that lots of her prices can be competitive because she knows what sells fast and can buy these items in larger volumes. Business is always good — prime business is during lunchtime (when four employees are often needed), but the store is open 'til 10:30 p.m. — and there is little waste. Rathert buys luncheon meat by the chunk and prepares the hot sandwich makings herself. Because she knows her customers by name, she hasn't had "bad check" problems and will cash personal checks up to \$15, another appreciated convenience.

Nor has she had the shoplifting headache of larger businesses. "I had a little problem once a few years ago when new pledges at a fraternity were told to come and 'see what they could get,'" she recalls. "But I knew who they were, and I just went over and talked to them." And that ended that.

RATHERT OBVIOUSLY ENJOYS her young patrons, and oftentimes students stop by just to chat or talk over problems. "It helps keep me young," she says.

"She knows everybody and will ask, 'how's things in your home town?'" says Jim Lionberger, a resident of Beta Theta Pi Fraternity. "And the place is so handy. It's close enough to stop by just for a soda, or during 15-minute study hall breaks, or if you don't happen to like the food at the fraternity that day."

"The row of fraternity houses on College Avenue is isolated from Greektown and from shopping places, and fewer people had refrigerators in their rooms when I was there," says Steve Roszell (AB '71), now director of alumni activities, who lived three years at Sigma Nu Fraternity. "But you could walk to the shop." There is, in fact, no parking area for the store. "When we were studying, someone would get up a list for maybe 12 guys and make a 'run' over to Lee Street Shop. And since drinking wasn't allowed in the rooms, guys would sit in their cars in the parking lot and drink beer and, of course, they would want snacks to go with it," he recalls.

Over the years, Rathert has developed special friendships with some of her "regulars" who, after they leave Campus, remember her with letters and cards.

One alumnus, William Tuohy, AB '65, who lived across the street from the Lee Street Shop for three years, includes in his memories "nights when he sat studying and could hear the old screen door of the shop banging until late at night" and voices of students as they sat on the concrete ledge outside the shop talking — something they

still do in good weather.

Tuohy is a writer and photographer living in Miami and keeps in touch with Columbia through the Ratherts, whom he calls a "good all-American family." Harvey Rathert is employed by the University and four of the couple's five children are Mizzou graduates. All had a hand in "minding the store."

Since most of the older residents of the area are gone, not a lot is known about the store's early beginnings. One person who has lived on the street throughout the shop's history is H. H. Krusekopf, retired professor of agronomy at the University, now in his nineties. According to him, the Lee Street Shop begun by Charles Gilbert and his wife was in a garage-like structure, since demolished, on the other end of the two-block street for a few years before Gilbert moved it to the present basement location, and catered mainly to permanent residents.

Most of the succeeding shopkeepers leased the building, renting out the student apartments above and managing the shop below. Mrs. Max Shipley, a Columbian who, along with her late husband, ran the shop in 1954, recalls that at that time students could make their own sandwiches (since tabooed by health authorities) for 15 cents, and that hard-boiled eggs then cost a nickel.

The store also has helped many students pay their way through school. Peter Land, BS '58, PhD '64, a physicist at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, managed the shop along with a brother and two sisters (who attended Mizzou) during the 1956-57 school year.

June and Don Owens lived above the shop and managed it from 1957-64 while Don, now a rural veterinarian in Parnell, Missouri, worked on his veterinary degree. "They called us 'Mr. and Mrs. Lee Street,'" says June, who is currently pursuing a nursing degree from Missouri Methodist Nursing School. "I can remember fraternities at initiation time sending pledges over many times at two or three in the morning for 'treasure hunts,'" she says. "I always got up when they knocked."

And the store has been a part-time job for lots of other students living nearby. Rathert presently employs nine students, who can fit their hours into their class schedules, and counts a total of 105 students who have worked at the shop during the 13 years she has managed it.

THE SHOP'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY celebration in October featured an open house with punch and cookies, sales of "Lee Street Shop" tee-shirts — and flowers and plaques sent by fraternities. "In appreciation for 50 years of service to Chi Mu Chapter of Phi Gamma Delta," reads one plaque, proudly displayed over the counter.

Students away from home enjoy the warmth of this special little shop, which has dared to survive during the reign of super market giants and fast food franchises. As one daily visitor, Kelly Grant, puts it: "The store has a flavor to it. I hope it will stay for a long time to come." □