

Store closing after 86 years

BY JENNI DUNNING

jdunning@lfpres.com

SHEDDEN — When Leonard and Ruth Palmer opened their general store here in 1922, life was simpler.

Groceries were delivered by horse and buggy. Ontario was largely agricultural. Canada had fought its first world war. William Lyon Mackenzie King was prime minister.

Next week, pending a last-minute buyer, Palmer's Supermarket will close for good — ending three generations of family retailing.

see **PALMER'S** | Page A7



VIDEO: Tour the old store. Click on Videos at lfpres.com



MORRIS LAMONT mlamont@lfpres.com

Leonard Palmer carries out a box of bottled water for a customer of Palmer's Supermarket in Shedden, which will close next week.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2008

PALMER'S



“It’s sad to think that the family name, the family legacy couldn’t be carried on forever.”

Leonard Palmer

Store set to close Oct. 4 after stock sold

FROM PAGE A1

“It’s sad to think that the family name, the family legacy couldn’t be carried on forever,” Leonard Palmer, the original owner’s grandson, said yesterday.

He’s one of several family members, including his three sons and 78-year-old parents, who own and operate the business.

While it’s the only grocery store in the Elgin County village, Palmer said it was too tough for the independent store to keep up with chains.

Once, butchers and grocery stores were the only competition, he added. Now, drugstore chains — many sell groceries — are a larger threat.

“That’s not to say that the store’s not viable, (but) things have changed,” he said.

To keep up with competition, he said, service would suffer and the store would have to open Sundays — something it has never done.

Longtime customers say the Palmers are like an extended family.

“It’s a very friendly atmosphere. If you bought a lot, one of the boys would carry it out for you,” said Barbara Plank.

Once the store closes, customers will have to shop in other centres, such as Dutton or St. Thomas.

The store has been in the family name since 1922. The building was erected in 1875.

“We used to see the young kids going to school. They’ve all been retired for some time, and here we are still going. I think it’s about time to retire.”

Jean Palmer

It still has some of its original wooden slat flooring and ramps in the floor show where additions to the building have been made over the years.

Old equipment and containers are on display, including a scale from the 1930s that’s still used to weigh nails.

Palmer’s was one of the area’s first Red and White chain stores — they became Valu-Marts — before going independent in 1980.

The store is set to close Oct. 4, after all its stock is sold.

The family couldn’t find anyone to buy the business and the stock. Now, they’re looking for someone to buy what’s left.

The decision to close said Palmer’s father, Ralph, who still butchers at the store.

“That was my life. It was a meeting place for neighbours.”

Ralph and his siblings inherited the store from his parents in the 1950s.

He used to live above the store and grew up working there, weighing oatmeal and potatoes in bulk and making deliveries.

Now, he lives in a house across the street with his wife, Jean, who bakes dozens of apple and rhubarb pies every week to sell in the store.

The closing is a bittersweet ending for the couple, Jean said.

“We used to see the young kids going to school. They’ve all been retired for some time and here we are still going,” she quipped.

“I think it’s about time to retire.”

Jenni Dunning is a Free Press reporter.

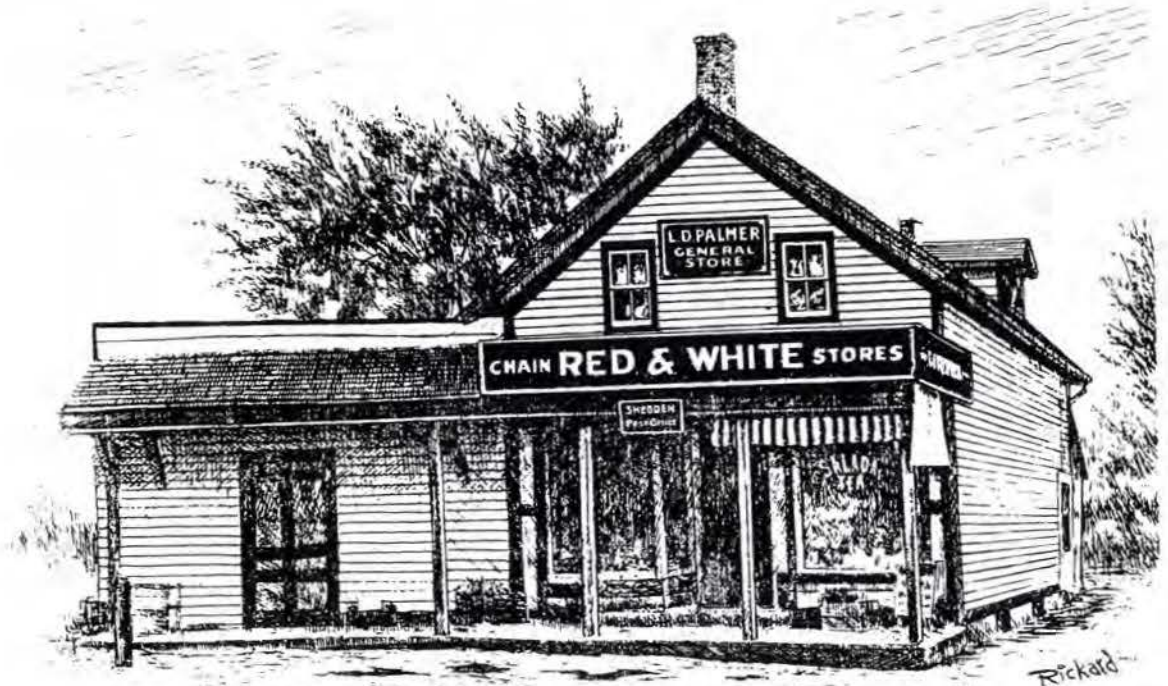
PALMER'S RECOGNITION NIGHT

-AGENDA-

Tuesday, November 25, 2008

6:00 p.m., Keystone Complex

- 1. Welcome and Opening Remarks**
- 2. Request - Sign Guest Book** (one at each table)
- 3. Book of Memories** - located at the back table
- 4. Grace** - Dean Proctor
- 5. Dinner** - order of tables - **Head table followed by others**
- 6. Introduction of Head Table**
- 7. Entertainment provided by Bill Farquhar** (3 sing songs)
- 8. History of Palmer's** - introduce Jean Palmer
- 9. Skit - Shedden Women's Institute**
- 10. Comments -**
 - Marion Orchard
 - Ann McLean
 - Beatrice Robins
 - Bob Silcox
 - Mayor James McIntyre - * Copies of the letter to the Editor by Currie and Connie Silcox at back table
- 11. Entertainment - Bill Farquhar**
- 12. Presentations**
 - Ann McLean
 - Mary Ann Caughell
 - Connie Silcox
- 13. Speech - Palmers**
- 14. Closing Remarks**



PALMER'S GENERAL STORE ca1923
SHEDDEN Southwold Township

If you lived within the Shedden community, you would have, at some point shopped at the local Red and White grocery store. Yet, few know the humble beginnings of this steadfast establishment. This handout will hopefully both enlighten and delight you.

Some may remember the very first "actual" store front at the west end of the block. Leonard (L.D.) and Ruth Palmer moved to this location in 1922 from Fingal. They raised their family in the back of the store with sleeping accommodations upstairs. Their dining room was the meat counter area and their kitchen was the

packaging area. The store at this time only sold grocery items with a Post Office (opened in 1929) at the front attended by Ruth. In the late 1930s, this business was operated from the back in what most of us would now remember as the produce section. In 1960, the Post Office then moved across the highway to its present location.

All four of L.D. and Ruth's sons (Clarence, Douglas, Ralph, Eric) worked in the store from a young age and continued to help through their school years. Two of the sons, Douglas and Eric went on for post secondary educations in teaching and in medicine.

[All of the sons have since deceased except for Ralph.]

A barbershop, an insurance company, a doctor's office that was occupied by 4 consecutive doctors (Dr. Spensley, Dr. Faulds, Dr. Potter, and Dr. Monteith), and a large furniture store (Braddon's) in the early 1920-1930's, were the main businesses in the building(s) to the east of the main store. There was a switchboard operator that worked from the upper west end of the store. She was also responsible for sounding the alarm (a whistle) when there was a fire call. This service was moved across

the road in the later years. L.O. and Ruth moved their family across the street in the late 1940's to the current home of Ralph and Jean. Clarence and Dorothy then used the back living quarters and raised their two daughters here. Dorothy gave piano lessons from the back of the store. They then moved out in the early 1950's and purchased the home on the east side of the CIBC bank. Several newlyweds and other young couples have made the Palmer apartment their home over the years. Eventually this space on the main level became incorporated into the store for work purposes. All of the perishables were kept in the basement of the store until the 1930's when the first 8' long showcase was purchased to service meat, eggs and butter. Until this point, the butter was kept down in the well behind the store (where the back driveway is now) for freshness. Eventually, the entire building location was purchased for expansion. Unfortunately,

L.O. and Ruth both passed on before the store expanded as it is today (1952 & 1953). Clarence and Ralph became partners in 1952 after the death of their father. Both Douglas and Eric had chosen other careers by this point in time. The space where the cement ramp is located by their "office" door was the original stairway to the second level. The first large expansion took place in 1962 with the incorporation of Braddon's Furniture store. This now became the main entrance to the grocery store. In the back by the baked goods is a door that currently opened to the storage area. Previously to the expansion, this was the door where members of the Odd fellows entered and to this day, a hole remains in the door about head height for the secret password waiting to be whispered to gain entrance! The public entrance to this building was on the west side of the structure, where the current air conditioning unit is. The Odd fellows

held dances in this area on a regular basis and live theatre was performed in the (now) bread section of the store for attentive audiences. Once this expansion took place, the store then offered a variety of footwear, clothing and gifts for their customers. Palmers continued to flourish and again in 1982 an expansion of major proportions began. Clarence and Ralph decided to honor the 60th anniversary of the founding of the business. There was a small brick building at the rear of the main store with over a thousand square footage surrounding it. This building was designated by the brothers for demolition and the plans were drawn up for an additional 1500 square feet of retail space. You can only imagine the stir this must have caused in the community to have such a large construction site right in the middle of town! The hardware and dry goods department were now a part of the Shedden Red and White! Charlie Judge had a hardware

store on the side street, and when he went out of business, Clarence and Ralph saw another aspect worthy of adding to their store. If some you can remember, the original card dealer sign "Hallmark" was still hanging over the entrance to the gift card area. These two brothers ran the store very successfully until Clarence passed away in 1994. Ralph then extended the partnership to include his two sons Len and Murray, and his son-in-law Murray Silcox. At some point, the basement was dug out (by hand!!) under the additions to accommodate storage and supplies.

For those who enjoyed the homemade pies, this element of the Palmers store began from a simple request one Thanksgiving for a pumpkin pie!! The market for this service snowballed from that one request to the shelves full of home baked goodies that were guaranteed to be fresh every week. (Jean could not put a date to the actual first pie, but

she roughly guessed it to be over 25 years ago.) The quality of service remained just as important today as when L.D. and Ruth first opened their doors to the public. The only part of that service that had changed was the method. Many a customer received their groceries delivered by a horse and a little red wagon.

Customers were given every opportunity to "pay" with whatever means they had available to them—eggs, produce, or a line of credit that they were trusted to pay when they could. Many items arrived in bulk to be prepared and packaged by hand.

Molasses and kerosene were delivered to the store in large barrels and customers brought their own smaller containers to be filled. Milk and produce were locally purchased and delivered almost daily to the store.

The motto at Palmers store was basically, if they did not stock it then they would do their best to bring it in for you. The service extended beyond

grocery and dry good items. Keys could be cut, knives sharpened, dry cleaning dropped off, and lawn mower blades brought back to life. You were guaranteed to be greeted with a smile, a genuine "how are you?" or an update on any thing important happening in the community, and usually a good laugh. This institution will never be matched again and sorely missed by everyone. Only the best wishes could be expressed to such a symbol of community as the Palmer family.

Community
Appreciation
Dinner
@
Shedden
Keystone
Complex
Nov. 25, 2008

THOSE GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS RECOGNIZING THE PALMERS

1. Southwold Pastoral Charge of Bethany and Frome
2. Boxall Women's Institute
3. Iona Station Baptist
4. Fingal Presbyterian Church
5. Fingal United Church
6. Fingal Baptist Church
7. Rosy Rhubarb
8. Shedden-Fingal Optimist Club
9. Shedden R E B E K A H's
10. Shedden Agricultural Society
11. Shedden Women's Institute
12. Shedden Odd Fellows
13. Lawrence Station Kensington Club
14. Southwold Volunteer Fire Department
15. Eastern Star

Nov. 25/08

CANADA



Palmer's store given a rousing salute

Cheryl Garvin, left, Carol Gordon, Connie Silcox and Pauline Silcox, members of the Shedden's Women's Institute, are The Red and White Cheerleaders as they pump up the crowd at the recent night of appreciation for the now-closed Palmer's store in Shedden. (Sun Media photo)

Jean Palmer speaks about the history of the family and the store. (Sun Media photo)



Palmer's Supermarket closes

On Oct. 4, Palmer's Supermarket in Shedden closed for good. Jean Palmer had a table to offer cookies and coffee for customers, and got up to give a hug to Jane Carder (R), a customer of 33 years.

Oct 4, 2008

JESSE CNOCKAERT/THE CHRONICLE

WITH
HEARTFELT
THANKS

The owners and staff of **PALMER'S SUPERMARKET** in Shedden wish to express our sincere thanks for the cards, gifts, notes of remembrance, flowers, and kind wishes, in regard to the closing of our store after 86 years - an important part of our past but we look forward to the future. Many thanks to our valued customers who became like family to us. May God bless you all. Ralph & Jean, Murray & Brenda, Len & Pat, Ian & Peggy, Murray & Ineke and our families

RALPH



JEAN



DOROTHY



CLARENCE



BRENDA



MURRAY



RUTH



FAMILY OWNED FROM 1922 - 2008

PALMER'S

COUNTRY STORE
SUPERMARKET

GROCERIES, MEAT, PRODUCE, GIFTS, TOYS, WORKWEAR, PAINT,
HALLMARK CARDS, HARDWARE, STATIONERY, RUBBER BOOTS

LEONARD



LEN



PAT



PEGGY



IAN



MURRAY



INEKE



Indeed, the iconic Palmers General Store in Shedden served for 85 years before closing in 2008

Baker said the Palmer family took museum staff through the building and they were able to obtain some classic general store items, tin signs in particular.

The size of their exhibit space on the fourth floor of the Elgin County Administration Building is about the same size as a traditional general store, Baker noted. They'll even have a store door set up that visitors will pass through and a classic post office wicket from McBride's General Store in Iona.

Baker and others spent six months researching and preparing the exhibit, and discovered there were more general stores, and information, than at first glance.

"I was quite surprised and delighted by the amount that's around and the fact that there are so many (general stores) standing. It makes



Mrs. L. D. Palmer, left, and Stella Schraeder (later Garrow) in front of Palmer's Red and White in Shedden, circa 1930. (Photo courtesy Jean and Ralph Palmer)

it a much more important pursuit to get some of this material together, he noted.

"In the long run, we look forward to doing that because we do want to assemble a pretty good list of our heritage structures."

Palmer's was about people

By Dorothy Gebert



Museum exhibit includes memories of Shedden general store

When Palmer's Supermarket closed its doors in October 2008, the surrounding community lost more than just a store, it lost its central hub.

"We were a place where you could find out what was going on," says Jean Palmer, a member of the family who owned the store in Shedden for over 85 years.

General stores were a com-

mon sight at many rural corners across Elgin County, but transportation and economic pressures made it difficult to compete with large chain stores, especially when they began displaying a wider selection of merchandise once offered by the small country store.

To remember this once-common way of doing business, the Elgin County Museum is presenting a new exhibit this spring and summer called "Rural Retail: Elgin County's General Stores."

Among the large display of 19th and 20th century artifacts from general stores across Elgin County are items from Palmer's Supermarket, including the Red & White sign that used to hang over the porch of the original building.

General stores were a common sight at many rural corners across Elgin County.



Jean and Ralph Palmer visit the Elgin County Museum to see items from their former store.

But objects only tell part of the Palmer's story. It's the memories of being part of the community that co-owner, Ralph Palmer, remembers most.

"We had the post office in the store for almost 40 years," Ralph recalls. "We had one of the only phones in the area for a long

for free. And the fire phone activated the siren to alert the volunteer fire fighters to gather at the store."

"Rural Retail" is on display now until August 21 at the Elgin County Museum, 450 Sunset Drive in St. Thomas. Admission is free. For more info,

Photo by Dorothy Gebert

**131 TALBOT RD
35799 TALBOT LINE**

HISTORY

This former school was built in 1866. The second room was added at a later date. This 2 room school S. S. # 9, Southwold closed in June 1966 after celebrating its centennial. For a short while it was used a residence by Mr. T. Benner.

This property was purchased by Gary and Eileen (Koyl) Carr and opened as the "Old School-House Restaurant" on January 20, 1984. It was operated by Nancy (Carr) Smith until 1997 when the new proprietors were Tamme Matthews of Shedden and Pat Paquette of Chatham. They renamed it "Old Schoolhouse Restaurant" They opened for business March 28, 1997 and closed on or about July 12, 1998.

1999 - re-opened as "Old Schoolhouse Restaurant and Appletree Gift Shop" - Prop. D. Ross McTavish.

Shedden Women's Institute
Dora McArthur - Curator
April, 2001



GRAND OPENING OF NEW RESTAURANT — The Old School House Tea Room (Restaurant) located in the village square at Shedden, will open this Friday, January 20th with a ribbon cutting ceremony at 12 o'clock noon. The century-old building was formerly a school from 1866 until its closing in

1966. Very little activity has taken place there since that time. Proprietors of the new restaurant are Gary and Eileen Carr. Mrs. Carr is also manager of The Village Pantry Boutique, found next door to the restaurant.

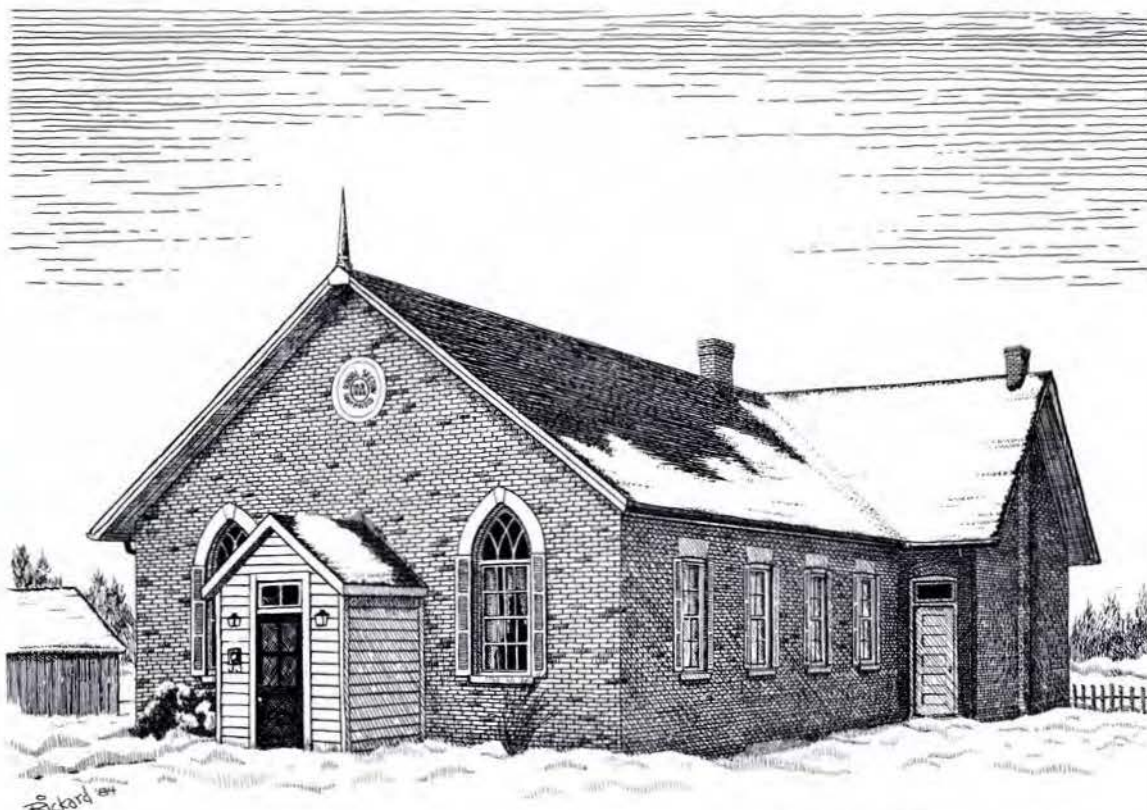


Dutton Advance
January, 1984

HISTORY UNVEILED — Mrs. Eileen Carr, who will open a restaurant in the old school house in Shedden, shows off a wooden black-

board and still-legible 1901 writing, which was uncovered when the slate blackboard was removed during renovations. The new eatery opens Friday.

Old Shedden school is now a restaurant



PUBLIC SCHOOL SS. 9, SHEDDEN, 1866.

Diners at a new tea room and restaurant in Shedden can get a lesson in English history, circa 1904, for free.

Eileen Carr, whose Old School House Tea Room Restaurant opens Friday in the 118-year-old "SS No. 9," said that renovations turned up some interesting memories of yesteryear.

When the old slate blackboard was removed an even older wooden one was found underneath, with an English history assignment still legible.

Mrs. Carr said she and her husband, Gary, have tried to retain as much of the flavor of the old school house as possible. New flooring had to be installed — the old wooden boards had rotted since the school closed in 1966 — but the original wainscoting, the blackboards and other features were incorporated into the decor.

White ruffled "cotton candy" curtains, and a fresh coachman blue and white paint job have done wonders for the old room, she said.

Homemade "country print" tablecloths and other touches will fill out the old-fashioned look.

Elgin County warden Bud Marr will cut the ribbon at noon, and the restaurant, culmination of years of work, will be open for business. The restaurant will seat 42, and will feature light breakfasts, lunch and afternoon tea. For the time being dinners will be limited to groups meeting there, she said, but dinner may be served in the future if business is good.

Mrs. Carr said she will continue to operate the Village Pantry Boutique, which she opened four years ago, and which is next door to the school house.

She said her sister-in-law, Nancy Smith, a former caterer and "all around good cook," will preside in the kitchen, and two or three waitresses will be on duty.

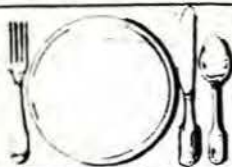
"A 'school house special' will be featured daily, as well as a homemade soup of the day, tea and finger sandwiches, and more substantial fare.

The restaurant will be open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., she said.

The building in which the restaurant is housed served as a school from 1866 to 1966, when grades one through eight, which had studied there for a century, were sent to a central school.

AT THE PLATE

By Barb and Chris
Dennett



The welcome mat at the door bids a cheery hello, the placemats at the table advertise the upcoming Wallace-town Fair and the motto on the wall insists loftily but accurately that "The greatest of faults . . . is to be conscious of none." Indeed, indeed and let the fall teahouse season begin. There is no real autumn sparkle to the air yet but there is a touch of color to the leaves and the Macintosh apples are beginning to show red on the trees.

The time is ripe for some early, very early, teahouse testing.

As we do every year we try for something new and, following a good line of tips and satisfied burps laid down by faithful readers who like to get out and about in the county areas, we pay a call on the relatively new and interesting Old School House Tea Room which sits, yes in an old school house, on Highway 3 in the middle of the Elgin County town of Shedden.

This old school carries the date 1866 over its door and the school section number nine. Like most of its yellow and red bricked kin, it died in the late 1960s when the new rural central school was invented along with those busy yellow and black school buses that now ply the county road systems ferrying children to and from their educations.

Owners Gary and Eileen Carr have worked hard to turn their little find into a warm and caring teahouse and they have done well enough to generate a solid lunchtime crowd. Naturally, the daily menu is inscribed on the old chalkboard and it promises a lengthy lineup of sandwich and salad items plus a couple of lively and warming specials.

There is a lasagna, for example, and a homemade meat pie with gravy — both of which sell for \$3.95 with a bit of salad on the side. The house also offers a small but interesting salad bar which can be included with the soup of the day for a cheap and easy lunch.

As we do with all teahouses, we look for that home-cooking touch, that ex-

tra touch of sincerity that will make an ordinary dish look and taste better. Disappointingly, the Old School House does not do well in this area. Most of the food items are very basic and straightforward, backed up by the usual variety of fancy teas. The beef sandwich on white with a touch of mayo is about as basic as a sandwich can be. Even the pickle is dull. The house broccoli soup that goes with it is just as basic and owes much of its taste and color to a can with some fresh broccoli thrown in for texture and crunch. We are off to a bad start.

On the other side of the table, however, we do better. The house meat pie is very beefy and the gravy gives the finished job that touch of specialness we have been looking for. Likewise the apple pie and the carrot cake which follow have been nicely, if unspectacularly, prepared. We enjoy a pot of fancy tea and discuss the line of crafts that the house is marketing both here and across the street at the Village Pantry Boutique. Are we wrong, or is every craftsperson in Ontario carving ducks. Everywhere you look these days it is ducks, ducks and more ducks.

The best thing about teahouses though, is their rural nature and atmosphere and the Old School House has plenty of this. It invites all and sundry to sign its visitor's book and takes special pleasure in serving anyone who actually went to school in old S.S. #9 and there are still plenty of those people around. Shedden, a neat and tidy town which takes special pride in its appearance, is also a nice place to drive to this time of year.

This being the time of year when teahouses shine at their best we won't be too critical about the Old School House. It is a nice place to visit and it is very close to those Elgin County apple orchards which beckon so juicily at this time of year. It would be nice though if the management could brighten its food preparation just a little. Some fancy breads would be nice and maybe a muffin or two and a little more zip with those sandwiches and soups.

The Old School House Tea Room, Highway 3 in Shedden. Open Tuesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Major cards accepted. Lunch for two about \$10. No licence.



NEW PROPRIETORS - The renamed Old Schoolhouse Restaurant in Shedden is under new management. Tamme Matthew of Shedden, left, and Pat Paquette of Chatham, the new proprietors, are excited about operating their own business. A new kitchen with a deep fryer, breakfast and charcoal grills, a partition and tablecloths are the only physical changes. Now a family-style dining restaurant, the new full menu includes breakfast, lunch and supper items. Tamme said that she had been looking at starting a business based on one of her passions, food or flowers. Pat has been in the food service industry for six years.

Opened for business March 28, 1997

Shedden W. I.
Tweedsmuir History
Curator - Dora McArthur
April 1997

Good books help small businesses

By TIMES-JOURNAL STAFF

Bookkeeping is often one of the last things on an entrepreneur's mind.

But it should be one of the first things you think about, says Janice Norley, owner of Integrated Administration.

"It is very important to start your books as soon as you can," she says. "I can set your books up if you're a new business or I can handle them on an ongoing basis."

"It's never too late, it just takes more time to get back on track."

Keeping good books isn't just for Revenue Canada, it also helps a small business grow.

"It is really important to see your income and if your costs are too high," she notes. "There are all kinds of things your books can tell you."

With 15 years experience in the bookkeeping field, Norley opened Integrated Administration in April, 1996.

She also offers a business plan service, for both startups looking for bank loans and existing businesses in the process of change.

Integrated Administration also of-



Janice Norley

fers a newsletter service, which she says is a great marketing tool.

Norley runs two of her own newsletters — Friendly Fax, which is sent out for free to small businesses every second month, and a newsletter for the people in the village of Shedden.

Dora McArthur - 1998
Shedden WI
Tweedsmuir History
1998