

# Springs Store: Cornerstone of the Community

Written by: **Mary Reisinger**



In the small, rural community of Springs, Pennsylvania, just a few miles from the Maryland line, a general store with a peaked roof sits beside the road. Horses and buggies, cars, and trucks fill the parking lot. It is remarkable enough for an independent store to thrive in these days of big box franchises, but what makes this store even more unusual is that it has been in business since 1896.

The farming community and vibrant small town we know today as Springs developed from a dense white pine and hemlock forest with many springs providing good water. In the late 1700s, the crossroads was called Folk for the first settlers to build a home there, George Folk and his family. A small log schoolhouse, the Folk School, was built in the early 1800s.



**Top:** The F.W. Bender General Merchandise store (circa 1900), in the former school building, was remodeled adding large warerooms and other improvements.

**Inset:** Tractors in front of F.W. Bender store, January 24, 1929.  
*BOTH PHOTOS COURTESY SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY*

As the town acquired a few more inhabitants, it became known as Chestnut Springs due to a chestnut tree standing near the local spring. When the first schoolhouse was outgrown, a second, larger schoolhouse was built in 1844. Worship led by itinerant preachers had been held in residents' houses or barns, but a church was completed in 1871 (and renovated and enlarged in 1916).



When the nearby Tub post office, named for a stream called Tub Mill Run, was moved to Springs, the village acquired the moniker of Tub. Since the name made them a bit of a “laughingstock,” townspeople petitioned to have the post office officially changed to “Springs,” and this was done on January 1, 1903.

E.K. Blauch was assigned as the town’s first postmaster in 1894. Blauch opened the town’s first store at the same time, but closed this establishment in 1895.

F. W. “Fred” Bender, with the help of a silent partner, Eli M. Miller, took up the mantle of storekeeper in 1896, using a 16 x 20 foot shed in his front yard to open F.W. Bender and Company. The two men pooled their funds for a total of \$250, and borrowed another \$250 in order to stock the shelves. Within the week, the till held five dollars, considered very good money at the time. Eli sold his share a few months later.

Sales were sporadic, so the shop was not regularly staffed. Instead, a wire was run from the store shed to the Benders’ home so that customers could ring a bell to summon someone from the Bender house for assistance with purchases.

In 1899, when the second schoolhouse was replaced with a larger structure, Fred Bender bought the former school building and remodeled it for use as a store, adding large warerooms and other improvements. The shop space was equipped with floor to ceiling shelves, accessed by rolling ladders secured to tracks. The shelves were fully stocked



**Top: F.W. Bender Store and Warehouse in Springs, Pennsylvania, in the 1940s.**

*PHOTO COURTESY SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY*

**Inset: F.W. Bender standing in front of his store about 1948.**

*PHOTO COURTESY KRISH BENDER MAUST*

with many items, including bulk foods like flour and oatmeal; huge cylinders of cheese; clothing, shoes, and hats; kerosene; molasses; feed; fertilizer; and various kinds of hardware and tools. Cold spring water filled a trough in the basement that was used to chill perishables such as crocks of butter.



**Arbuckles Coffee promotion at the Springs Store – patrons received a free writing tablet with the purchase of a pound of Arbuckles Coffee.**

*PHOTO COURTESY SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY*

Blauch, the village's first storeowner, resumed his mercantile business for a time after Bender opened his store, but in 1905, the postmaster position went to John W. Folk, and then in 1909, that role was passed on to Fred Bender. The Bender store was already a success, and the inclusion of the post office within its walls added to its appeal. People came to collect or send mail, to shop, and to congregate with others on the front porch or inside around a potbelly stove.

More residents and businesses located in Upper Springs, and C.F. Killius had a store there from 1913 until 1927. As these other stores came and went, the F.W. Bender Store continued to flourish.

Fred tackled challenges with ingenuity and energy. In 1908, he purchased "a huge, three-seated, sight-seeing automobile." He removed the regular body and replaced it with a truck body so that it could be used for hauling, but every Saturday night, the truck bed was switched with the original seats so that the family could go for Sunday drives.

Before electricity arrived in Springs, Fred used a Delco System to light the store, the Bender home, and Springs Mennonite Church. One evening during a church service, two of the older Bender children were home babysitting the three younger boys. They stuck a metal button hook into an empty socket to see what would happen. All the lights went out, and Fred had to come home, leaving other congregants waiting in the dark, and restart the system.

Later, a homemade burglar alarm was set up between the house and store, so that if anyone tried to enter the store after hours, a clanging bell and blazing lights were activated. Fred's children and grandchildren later recalled this as terrifying, but fortunately, attempts at burglary were rare.

By all reports, Fred Bender had a generous disposition. Many drummers (salesmen) traveled on the B&O Railroad to Meyersdale, took a trolley to Salisbury, and hired a horse and buggy to drive them to Springs. At the end of this arduous journey, the drummers were given homemade meals prepared by Fred's

wife Malinda in the family home just behind the store. If any of the salesmen missed a meal, Fred would give them cheese and crackers in the store.

Fred's barn was often filled with chickens, pigs, and cows taken in barter. He then sold these for cash. Children even picked up chestnuts from Fred's own trees and bartered them for penny candy. Often, customers who couldn't pay in the winter were given credit until they had income again.

A large, two-story warehouse was built to one side of the store, with a manually operated elevator to carry stock between the two floors. As an adult, Verda Yoder recalled spending many evenings playing basketball with other young people in the high-ceilinged upper room.

During World War II, the store took part in tin can and newspaper drives so that these items could be recycled. Local people also picked and brought in elderberries. The store weighed and paid three cents a pound for the berries, which were sent to Kraft Foods for jelly.

The Bender store produced a monthly newsletter, the Barn-E-Gram, alerting customers to bargains and new stock arriving, but also containing amusing stories and quotes to entertain its readers. One piece describes a group holding up tarps to catch the apples while the tree is shaken; it advises people who use this method to wear helmets since many of the apple pickers were "nursing battered heads." Fred Bender's daughter Rhoda's parody lyrics set



Left: Elderberry collection time at Springs Store.

PHOTO COURTESY SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Below: F.W. Bender's store produced a monthly newsletter, the Barn-E-Gram, alerting customers to bargains and new stock. Excerpts from a 1947 volume were published in the 1990 Vol. XXX of *The Casselman Chronicle*.

to the popular song "Sixteen Tons" were published in another Barn-E-Gram:

*Some people think a feed dealer's rolling in dough,  
That prices are high and eggs are low—  
Hustle and haul and hope for luck  
That you don't end up with a broken down truck.*

*You load Sixteen Tons, what do you get?  
Either much colder or covered with sweat.  
Uncle Sam, don't you call me, 'cause I can't go—  
My time is sold to a country store.*

Fred Bender continued to run the store until his death in March of 1949. His seven children made sure the store carried on, eventually hiring Robert and Merle ("Dutch") Kolb as managers. Later, Dutch and his wife Maxine bought the place. Dutch Kolb made practical changes while preserving many traditions of the Bender years such as making weekly deliveries, a great convenience for local families. Phoebe Beachy Wiley remembers her mother having the next week's order ready when each delivery was made. To the children's disappointment, the only items that usually made the list were staples such as cereal, flour, sugar, and yeast, but one unforgettable evening near Christmas, Dutch arrived with a special delivery—seven bags of candy, one for each child.

The store entered a new era in the 1960s. The post office, long a fixture of the store, and postmaster John Harold Stangarone moved to the Keystone Building in 1964.

The following year, Annie and Wilbur Beitzel bought the store. The Beitzels had nine children ranging in age from

## BARN-E-GRAM

The Barn-E-Gram, was a monthly newsletter published by F. W. Bender's General Store. See excerpts below:

Feb. 1947, Vol. 13, No. 2:  
**IN THE STORE**

For a limited time we will sell ladies' dresses at half price. Come in and get a bargain . . .

Just now we are well stocked in all sorts of men's wear—wool coats, cotton jackets, leather jackets, reversible coats, sweaters, and cotton flannel plaid shirts. We even have knitted shorts for only 50¢.

For children we have outing pajamas at \$2.30.

In yard goods we offer three new wool and rayon 40-inch materials at \$2.25 a yard. colors are dark red, dusk pink and gold.

At last we got in some men's heavy brown work shoes, at \$6.50; also a supply of men's high rubber buckle boots.

We have on hand two electric shavers at only \$5.00 and \$7.50.

From time to time we have been getting in small lots of women wire fence and barb wire; also, a few more galvanized tubs and coal hods.

### NEW IMPLEMENT STORAGE HOUSE

Well, we struggled through inventory, income tax returns, and sundry dull reports of the season. Do we relax now? We do not! In a general store there's always something.

Our Spring project this year is to be a new building in which to store farm machinery. This will be made of Rodamach blocks, and added as an extension to the warehouse across the road. Watch the progress of our new storage house.

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June 1947, Vol. 13, No. 6:  
**IN THE STORE**

The International Harvester Co. is now manufacturing a Home Food Freezer. One of these handsome white enamel cases, which has a capacity of 11 cu. ft., is at the time of writing on display in the front of our store. Look it over.

We have for sale a Jamesway Feed Truck, which is a good-sized, rubber-tired cart, handy for hauling feed, etc., around the barn.

At last we have plenty of woven wire fence in the big warehouse, and are expecting more barb wire soon. Also, a shipment of nails.

Along the seed line we offer Lancaster Sure Crop and Old Virginia ensilage corn, several other kinds of seed corn, and Hybrid sweet corn.

We have enough fertilizer on hand to finish out the season.

Our dry goods shelves are getting filled up again. New items are: Cotton dress prints at 45¢ and 55¢; rayon prints at 98¢; unbleached muslin at 35¢; bleached muslin at 40¢; striped outings at 35¢; attractive bedspreads, figured in blue, green or peach, at \$6.00.

Recently we stocked up on Putnam dyes and tints.

We have a good line of men's and women's everyday straw hats.

Just got in several Samson electric irons, with temperature regulator for different fabrics.

Recently we added 7 dozen Nylon and 5 dozen Rayon hose to our stock.

Casselman Chronicle

13 to 1. Because of Wilbur's health problems, they were looking for an alternative to farming. With their people skills and entrepreneurial spirit, retail seemed a good fit, and the Bender store was ready for new owners.

Overhearing her parents discussing the money required for the purchase, five-year-old Julia offered them her pocket money, which she thought would surely be enough. Even without Julia's money, the Beitzels did buy the store at a good price and set about rejuvenating the business.

One of the major decisions they made was to convert the store to self-serve. This meant replacing the tall shelving with shelving that could be reached by customers, and installing coolers. To make up for the lost shelf space, the Beitzels enclosed the front porch and added a room for dry goods. They stopped selling gasoline and kerosene in order to focus on groceries, and five years after they took over the store, they discontinued the delivery route because it no longer was profitable.

In 1971, Wilbur and Annie decided to move their family to the store. They converted the top floor of the large warehouse to an apartment with six small bedrooms. Their family had grown to eleven children, nine of whom were still living at home when they made this move. Annie had difficulty with stairs because of a combination of injury and a form of muscular dystrophy, so the older boys, who were mechanically-inclined, installed a homemade electric elevator in place of the former manually-operated freight elevator.

When one of Annie's sisters needed work, the Beitzels created an expanded sewing department with fabric and notions in one of the warerooms for her to run. Over the years, the sewing department



**Top: A Nabisco product promotion during the time Merle "Dutch" Kolb (right) owned the Springs Store.**

**Middle: Wilbur and Annie Beitzel in the store after converting it to self-serve. Photo taken September 10, 1973, by Annie's sister, Emma Maust.**

**Bottom: A young Julia poses with her brother during the time her parents owned the store.**

*ALL 3 PHOTOS COURTESY LABAN AND JULIA TICE*

provided employment for several other women, and supplies for many local people, including Annie herself, who was a prolific quilter.

The middle of the Beitzel children, Julia, had five older and five younger siblings. All her younger siblings were brothers, including two sets of twins. As the youngest Beitzel children became old enough to go to school, Wilbur was able to take on some jobs outside the store, and Annie did most of the day to day management of the business, with the children pressed into service stocking shelves and pricing. One of the Beitzel sons remembers how motivating it was that if they finished their tasks early enough on summer days, they could go swimming.

Julia spent fourteen years growing up in the store, and she loved it. During her teen years, she would go down early to open the store and wait on the first customers of the day. When the school bus came, she rang a bell to alert her mother that she was leaving, so that her mother could come down and take over. Julia said her mother always made everyone feel welcome in the store, and the whole family learned customer service skills from her.

Laban Tice first encountered his future wife Julia when he had stopped in at the store one day with his cousin to pick up some snacks. As he waited in a long line at the cash register, Julia arrived home on the bus from her senior year of high school. Seeing the long line, she immediately stepped behind the counter and started ringing up purchases. Her quick attention to what was needed made an impression on Laban.

In 1979, just a year before Julia and Laban started dating, Julia's parents sold the business and took up residence in the former Bender home behind the store. It had been divided into apartments, and they returned it to a single family home.

The new owners of Springs Store were Greta and Gary Miller. Gary was an electrician and used the lower floor of the warehouse for his equipment and supplies.



**Top: The Springs Store after enclosing the front porch, adding a room for dry goods, and removing the gas pump.**

*PHOTO COURTESY LABAN AND JULIA TICE*

**Bottom: The Springs Store today after updates and expansion into the warehouse area (brick portion).**

*PHOTO BY MIKE CALHOUN*

Though Laban was a farm worker when he and Julia married, they both knew that this was not what he wanted to do for a living. They had a discussion one day about what other employment he could try, and they agreed that running a store would be ideal. Julia had had such happy years at the Springs Store that she wished this could be the store they bought, but they knew that the Millers had had it for only four years. That evening, they went to visit Julia's parents and learned that the Millers had just decided to sell the store.

Within a month, on July 1, 1983, Julia and Laban had bought the business. The Millers retained ownership of the buildings, and Gary continued to use the warehouse for

storage. Julia and Laban moved into the apartment over the warehouse where she had lived as a child.

Julia feels that it is vital to be sensitive to the needs of customers. In an illustration of this practice, Phoebe Wiley describes finding Norman Yoder sitting in his buggy outside the Springs Store one winter day in December 1990. The snow around the hitching post had not yet been cleared, and he didn't trust his horse to wait without being tied, so Julia had taken his order inside, filled it, and carried out the boxes of groceries to him.

Laban says they have learned that for the business to succeed, it is necessary to continually grow and change. They adjusted the departments accordingly. Some of the products they had sold to the Amish, such as shoes, were now being sold in Amish stores, so Julia and Laban stopped stocking them. On the other hand, when the local meat locker closed, Julia and Laban put freezers into an outbuilding so that the Amish, who live without electricity in their homes, could rent freezer space.

The Tices sold off the sewing supplies and used that area to re-package bulk food. Selling bulk food allowed them to remain competitive with large grocery stores in terms of price, and it enabled them to sell items not commonly found in other local stores. The room that had housed the sewing department also came in handy as a nursery and play space for Julia and Laban's son, born soon after they bought the store, and daughter, who was born a few years later.

It was difficult to make a living solely with the store, so Laban went to work at outside jobs. Julia became interested in going back to school and receiving some specialized training. After a decade running Springs Store, they decided the time was right to focus on other ventures. They sold the business to Cindy and Philip Maust in 1993.

Julia and Laban moved out of the apartment over the warehouse and bought the house Julia's parents were living in. They remodeled the house, incorporating a small summer house that had been behind the Bender home.



**Inside the store today, housewares, baking supplies, and other difficult to find items have been added, as well as bulk foods, a bakery, deli, and regular grocery items. PHOTOS ON BOTH PAGES BY MIKE CALHOUN**

This created space for two dwellings, the first floor for the Beitzels and the second floor for the Tices.

Laban continued to work for Casselman Lumber Company. Julia developed a new career path. She became a mediator, helped students who were earning community service credits, worked at a counseling center, and completed a degree in Human Resources. She was employed as secretary for the school board, and later went to work at Goodwill Mennonite Home in Human Resources.

The Mausts took over the business. Cindy Maust added a bakery, which proved quite popular; however, the Mausts



**Juanita Jo Yoder, owner of Springs Nutrition (inside the Springs Store), stocks vitamins, nutritional supplements, local honey and teas and a variety of chemical free products.**

did not enjoy being storekeepers and they put the business back on the market four years later.

In 1996, Twila and Owen Guengerich had moved from El Dorado, Arkansas, to Springs to be near family. Their daughter had married Julia's brother, so there was a family connection to the Tices. When Owen and Twila learned the next year that the store was for sale, they became interested.

Julia and Laban also were tempted when they learned that the business was available again. One day, Julia took a walk around the graveyard and met Twila. Their conversation that day led to the two couples agreeing to buy the business. As Julia puts it, Twila "prayed" them back to the store.

Starting in 1997, the four partners divided the duties according to their strengths. Owen Guengerich was a carpenter and enjoyed doing necessary building projects. Twila took over a section of the store and called it Springs Nutrition. Julia came in on Saturdays to make doughnuts and managed personnel for the store while she spent weekdays working elsewhere. Laban handled the routine management of the store.

The partners decided that they needed to own the buildings as well as the business. Gary Miller was reluctant to part with his warehouse, but they negotiated a sale in 2004. Later, Twila and Owen sold back their share to Julia and Laban. The two businesses continued to operate side by

side in the Springs Store, winning many loyal customers for the bulk foods, bakery, and deli that the Tices stocked, and the nutritional consultation and health food products that Twila provided.

By 2012, Twila and Owen were thinking about retirement and another move. Fortunately, Juanita Jo Yoder had moved to the Springs area from Kentucky, and was looking for an opportunity to set up her business as a healthy life coach. Juanita Jo worked with Twila for over a year before she bought Springs Nutrition in 2014. Twila continued to help out in the business for two more years before she and Owen moved to Washington State in 2016.

Juanita Jo has expanded Springs Nutrition; she stocks vitamins, nutritional supplements, local honey, and teas from approved sources, and chemical free body care products such as botanical soaps from John Daugherty's Fernwood in Grantsville, Maryland; goat's milk soaps from the Soakin' Goat in Mount Pleasant, Pennsylvania; and traditional tallow and lye soaps from Molly Klimas in Bruce-ton Mills, West Virginia. John Daugherty also supplies a line of essential oils, including a blend he custom-designed for Springs Nutrition called Medieval Robber's Blend. The basis of this blend is the legend that grave robbers during the Black Plague were able to avoid contracting the disease by using a mixture of certain aromatic oils derived from oregano, eucalyptus, clove and other ingredients.



Juanita Jo consults with clients on healthy life, primarily through vitamins and supplements. Arrangements can also be made through Springs Nutrition for aromatherapy consultation with Jessica Faidley and massage therapy with Lori Sines. In addition, Springs Nutrition carries a line of photographic stationery by local retired professor Phoebe Wiley, who identifies birds and plants on the back of each card. Juanita Jo herself has an interest in silver and old coins, and it is possible to buy and sell such items in her section of the store.



One more major change was on the horizon. About the time the Guengerichs were leaving, Julia and Laban came to the difficult decision that it was time to reduce their stake in the store. They interviewed several interested parties, but nothing worked out until they heard that Hannah and Matt Byler were thinking about buying the store.

Hannah had always liked the Springs Store and didn't want to see the business close, but neither she nor her husband Matt had any retail experience. Julia and Laban invited Matt and Hannah to dinner. As Hannah tells it, she went in thinking there was no way they could buy and run the store, and left dinner thinking that they should definitely do it. To begin learning about the operation, Matt worked for a couple of months before the purchase of the business on January 1, 2017.

The Bylers have followed the path that other owners have before them. They have sometimes combined other jobs (such as Hannah's library position) with store ownership, they are raising young children while managing the store, and they have adjusted the store's stock and services to keep abreast of changes in the community.

The store already had established a bakery, deli, bulk foods, and the separate nutritional supplements business. The Bylers brought in Hannah's mother, Charlotte Tice, to supervise the bakery. Their goal is to make bakery items and deli salads from scratch, just as they would do at home. Hannah and Matt have added some lines, notably housewares and baking supplies. The Bylers delight in supplying items that are difficult to find in other area stores.



**Top: Matt and Hannah Byler (with daughter Amelia) purchased the Springs Store from Julia and Laban Tice (right), January 1, 2017.**

*PHOTO COURTESY LABAN AND JULIA TICE*

**Bottom: Some of the unique items and bulk foods to be found at the Springs Store. PHOTO BY MIKE CALHOUN**

In response to the pandemic, they have followed safety protocols, changed some practices such as having customers reach into a basket to choose baked goods, and begun selling old-fashioned toys and books to help people buy gifts locally. To show their appreciation for the community's support during these difficult times, they were even able to provide a free Christmas dinner by handing out meals in ready to heat containers in the parking lot of the nearby church.

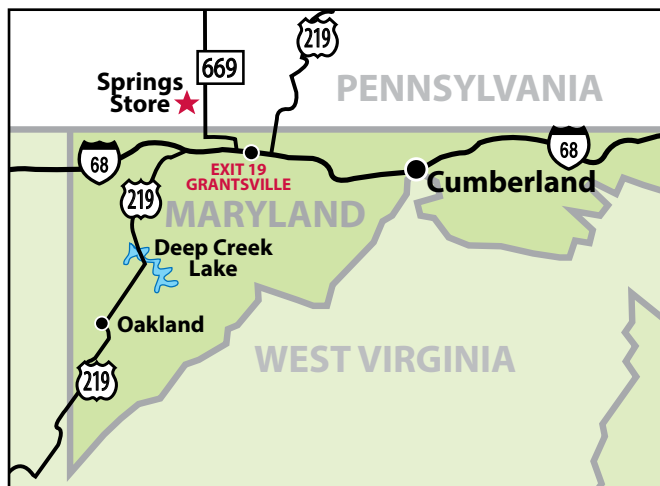
Laban Tice continues to help out, now working thirty rather than sixty hours a week. He enjoys not being a boss and not having to deal with regulatory paperwork. He and Julia, remembering that several new owners had decided to leave the business after four years, watched with relief as the Bylers' fourth anniversary came and went on January 1, 2021.

The Bylers say there have been challenges, but they are having fun with the store. They enjoy working together and thinking creatively about ways to do things better. They appreciate the history of the store as a cornerstone of the community and a welcome resource for people who live further afield or who are visitors to the area. Hannah sums up their experience thus far as both terrifying and gratifying. It looks as if the Bylers may indeed join the short list of long-term owners of Springs Store.

est. 1896  
**SPRINGS**  
**GENERAL STORE**

Springs Store & Springs Nutrition • 814-662-4175  
 1726 Springs Road, Springs, PA 15562

Springs Nutrition Website: [www.springsnutrition.com](http://www.springsnutrition.com)



## Springs, PA area also offers...



The **Springs Farmers Market** in the heart of rural Amish country will begin the 2021 season on **Saturday, May 22** and continue each Saturday through **September 18, from 8 am – 1 pm**. Fresh-picked produce, home-baked pies, breads, plants, antiques and flea market items line the tables. Housed in the large Springs Folk Festival craft building with the overflow extending over the grounds, the Market is a great place to meet and greet the neighbors while enjoying breakfast and lunch made to order at the Snack Bar.

Browse among the antique glass, furniture and iron-ware as well as new crafts, honey and maple syrup. Be sure to take a stroll on the self-guided **Alta Schrock Nature Trail** adjacent to the Farmers' Market. Total distance of the easy walking loop trail is 4/10 mile.

Don't forget to come back **October 1 & 2, 2021**, for the **Springs Folk Festival** celebrating over 150 craftsmen demonstrating their skills, continual music performances, hayrides and PA Dutch foods. All events are subject to COVID-19 PA State regulations. Keep posted on updates on our website and Facebook.

Visit the **Springs Museum**, adjacent to the Market, to visit the two-story building displaying an early school, church, store, living quarters and antique farm and industrial equipment, some manufactured in Springs in the early 1900s as well as 60 years of genealogical journals. See Springs Historical Society website for opening dates.

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