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Step back in time at the Fremont Store

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The Fremont Store is so old it existed two years before Minnesota became a state and five years before Abraham Lincoln became president.

Built in 1856 and located in Fremont Township, the general store sells “mostly candy and pop,” according to owner Martha Johnson, who is 100 years old and quick with a joke and smile. “And a few groceries, so you won’t starve.”

“When’s the last time you sold cactus oil?” asked Jerry McMillin, of Wabasha, who referenced a bottle during a visit with his young daughter:

“About 100 years ago,” quipped Johnson. “It cures everything.”

Some folks — including David Mueller, of Fremont Township — are regulars; he’s been known to stop by the store “a couple times a

day” for some goodies and conversation. “Like I told her, I should have some ownership in the thing,” laughed Mueller, who added he likes to come by and “give Martha a hard time.”

“He wants me to put in a Victoria’s Secret,” giggled Johnson.

“We’re trying to get her more business,” retorted a smiling Mueller.

Other visitors — including a recent group from Singapore — are merely curious and may never return again.

“They come from all over the country,” Johnson said. Customers range from “maybe two one day, maybe seven another.”

“We don’t make much money to pay the help,” said Johnson, who even at the ripe old age of 100, “doesn’t have time to take vacations.”

“Everyone knows her,” said David Heublein, of Fremont Township. “She’s a pillar of the community.”



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“I walk to work,” jokes Fremont Store owner Martha Johnson, who is 100 years old, lives in a house next door and “doesn’t have time to take vacations.” Johnson moved with her husband, Martin, from Hayfield to Fremont in 1949. “Sometimes lots of travelers stop. Sometimes just the local people,” she noted of the 160-year-old establishment. She sells “mostly candy and pop” — and a few groceries “so you won’t starve.”



“It’s unique, fun. The kids enjoy it,” says Jerry McMillin, of Wabasha, who said his visit to the Fremont Store with his daughter, Abigail McMillin, is “part of our once-a-year trip to Lanesboro” for the Rhubarb Race. “When’s the last time you sold cactus oil?” Jerry inquired when inside. “About 100 years ago,” joked owner Martha Johnson. “It cures everything.”



David Mueller, of Fremont Township, left, says he usually stops by the Fremont Store “a couple times a day” for “pop and a candy bar.” “Like I told her, I should have some ownership in the thing,” he joked. Clarence Mueller, of Fremont Township and unrelated to David, also is pictured.



ABOVE: “I won, Daddy,” declares Jadelyn Amstutz, of Greencastle, Pa., during a pit stop and game of checkers with her family at the Fremont Store. Owner Martha Johnson watches from the left.

LEFT: A bottle of Cactus Oil — and a bottle of Coke specially labeled for the store owner — decorate the interior of the store. The items are not for sale.



About Elizabeth Nida Obert | enida@postbulletin.com

It was a Saturday and my husband opted to join me on an interesting assignment in Spring Valley. En route back to Rochester, I received a news tip and made a detour on a back-country road to Lewiston. Before long, we came upon the Fremont Store — seemingly out of nowhere — and our curiosity beckoned. My husband bought a treat, and we had some conversation with the owner, Martha. A couple trips and months later, I would have a story to tell.

PHOTOGRAPHER'S TIP: Everyone has a story. The fun thing about being a photojournalist is finding those stories that are most interesting and telling them effectively. So keep your eyes and ears open — and your camera ready.