

Missing the Dixie Superette

By Ashley Thomas Memory

Although the disappearing countryside has affected North Carolina in many ways, one of the most tragic—and least documented—effects has been the near extinction of the countryside. Occasionally I chance upon the odd family-run grocery but I have yet to find a place that fits the mold of what had to be the original curb market: the Dixie Superette in Asheboro.

In my childhood the Dixie Superette was a landmark along U.S. 64, then more of a main street than the busy, multi-laned highway it is today. Part produce stand, part general store and part craft stall, the Dixie Superette was in a class all by itself. There was no better end to a summer's day than climbing into the bed of my grandfather's blue Ford truck and riding over to the Superette.

The Superette was dark and musty with dirty cement floors. The owner, an ornery red-haired man named Morris, displayed his wares with the sort of careless detachment that only a lack of competition can bring. Local produce, milk, and other groceries were sold alongside poodle-shaped toilet paper cozies crocheted by his wife. Near the cash register—and Morris's watchful eye—were jumbled boxes of the sweets no longer made nowadays: pixie sticks, candy cigarettes and flavored wax. To this day I don't know what those shelves along the far wall contained because us kids were too scared to go back there.

Customer preference had no bearing on the Superette's inventory. Morris stocked only what he thought was necessary. Just because he carried suntan lotion one week was no guarantee that he would ever do so again. There were never any specials—none of this “two for the price of one” — and absolutely no charging on credit. At the Dixie Superette, you simply forked over the cash: end of sale.

It was a harsh way to run a business perhaps but in my mind far more socially responsible. In spite of the lure of low prices, going to the Big K or Walmart is an exhaustive and demoralizing experience. There's so much merchandise that it's impossible to know the difference between what you *want* and what you really *need*. Shopping at the Dixie Superette taught me that even in this modern world we ought to be happy with what we have and that we'd be a lot better off if we simply paid more and consumed less.

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