

March 21, 1990 **M. Rapacz store shares in village history**

By Alan J. Krutz
C-S-E news writer

ST. JOHNSVILLE — It was 1909 when Michael Rapacz immigrated from the Ukraine at the age of 18 and settled in the Herkimer County area.

After working for three years at the Standard Desk Factory in Herkimer, Michael became tired of the sweatshop life of the factory worker. He decided he wanted something better for himself.

Michael heard from a friend that the nearby village of St. Johnsville could use another grocery store. And though he was still learning the English language, had little money and virtually no business experience, he decided to give it a shot.

In March of 1913, Michael opened a grocery store at the corner of Sanders and South Division streets.

The location proved to be a good one — near the railroad, close to the canal, and between two of the village's factories.

Products arrived by horsedrawn wagon from local farmers, by rail, and occasionally along the Erie Canal. The shipments were mostly received in bulk. In the early 1900s there were very few pre-packaged items available.

The hours Michael kept at M. Rapacz Grocers were long ones, especially on Saturdays when the business was open until midnight so that people could buy fresh meats for their Sunday dinners. Few home refrigerators were in use at the time, and ice was commonly used for preservation.

Business was brisk in those early years, and soon a larger place was required for both the Michael's thriving store and his growing family.



C-S-E photo/Alan J. Krutz

St. Johnsville area residents will recognize the interior of the M. Rapacz Store and Mathew Rapacz behind the counter. He is the third generation Rapacz to work at the family business on the corner of South Division and Hough streets. Mathew Rapacz is pictured serving a local family, while Mathew's father, Michael Rapacz Jr., in back, tends to a customer's meat selection.

In 1922, property on the corner of South Division and Hough streets was purchased and a new, store-apartment was built. It opened for business in 1923, the year Michael Jr. was born.

In 1923, the new M. Rapacz and Son store was the largest and the most modern in the village. Rapacz said people might chuckle at the thought considering the ultramodern

supermarkets of today.

The grandson of Michael Rapacz, Sr., Mathew, said friends of the elder Rapacz told him he was foolish for building such a large store. And in fact, when the store opened, there were not enough available products to fill all of its shelves.

Michael Jr. recalled that during the Great Depression, there was no such things as food stamps or a wel-

fare system. Many people facing hard times asked for, and received credit. Michael Jr. said that most of these bills were never repaid, but the people the elder Rapacz helped appreciated this and remained loyal customers for many years.

World War II brought its own series of hardships with federal price

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