

History of Parish Hardware

Many area residents are curious about recent activity around the commercial building at 2 South Main Street. Although it has had many owners in recent times, it is still referred to by long time residents as the "Parish Hardware Building."

The new owners, Ronald and Shelley Pollock, will operate a **SUBWAY** Restaurant in the building and will open this summer. With the renovations that they are doing and the recently applied new roof, this old Portville landmark will survive well into the 21st Century. Located beside this business at 4 South Main St. and sharing the Victorian façade, is New York Style, a beauty salon owned by Kelly Decker.

The story of the Parish Hardware Business began long before the big brick building was erected. It was in 1847 that the first Smith Parish opened a general store. He came to this area as a young man in 1830 and pursued the lumber and shingle businesses, as well as operating a grocery store.

According to an article on Smith Parish that appeared in the Olean Times Herald on September 11, 1967, the extension of the Genesee Valley Canal to Portville in 1857 made life a lot easier for the local merchants. "The first Mr. Parish's grocery store had a loading dock at the rear, and its own 'slip' which was like a railroad siding, to the extension of the Genesee Valley Canal. The mule drawn barges used to bring huge casks or hogsheads of whole wheat, brown sugar and other eatables to the store." Keeping the store well stocked was of utmost importance. "Often when a teamster loaded his wagon in the early morning for a trip into the woods to a lumbering camp, Mr. Parish would have sold more food before breakfast than his son, fifty years later, would sell all day."

Smith Parish's oldest son, David L. Parish,

joined him in the business and continued operating it after his father's death. The store was rebuilt after disastrous fires in both 1875 and 1885 destroyed the business.

It was in 1892 that David's son Smith Parish II purchased the brick store and business with attached tin shop from F. S. Persing. The first hardware store in Portville was Bennie Hardware. In a tintype in the PHPS Archives, it appears to be a small wooden structure. This business was later operated by Mr. Persing in the "Central Block" of wooden buildings that was built in 1875. The Central Block burned in 1885, after which a large brick building was erected that still exists today.

When Parish acquired the building, the store was only sixty feet long. The Masonic Lodge occupied the second floor. Members of the Lodge accessed it by an iron stairway at the rear.

Celebrating fifty years of business in 1942, Smith Parish commented on the early years. "When we began...all the stores remained open until 9 o'clock each night. The average laborer worked 10 hours a day, six days a week, for \$9 weekly. Staples were reasonable. Eggs brought around 10 cents a dozen."

After a reservoir was built, water was plumbed into businesses and many houses in Portville in 1895. The Parish Hardware added a plumbing shop and hired plumbers to install bathrooms. Also the stock of paint was enlarged.

The building was doubled in size with a three story addition at the rear and a basement in 1903. Also a freight elevator was added. By 1912, furniture and floor covering was added to the inventory. Until 1914, deliveries were made by a horse drawn wagon. The era of the gasoline engine had arrived and the first auto delivery truck was purchased.

When electricity came to Portville in 1919 and 1920, wiring supplies and appliances were added.



SMITH PARISH

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Smith Parish, on the right, and from left, his grandson, Donald, and sons, Robert and David.

In 1932, the business was incorporated under the name of Smith Parish, Inc., with Smith Parish as President and his sons, Robert and David, as officers. They continued to manage the store after their father's death in 1943. In the 1950's, the first floor display areas of the store were modernized.

John Little began running the hardware store in 1978. In 1982, Portville Hardware was purchased by Dennis and Chris Jerome who added guns and hunting apparel to the inventory. It was then sold to John and Linda Hedden, who owned the store from 1989 to 1991. In 1994, it was owned by Thomas and Margaret Pascucci who operated a Christmas Store until 1999. Then it was sold to Kelly Decker, who ran the Brick House, an under-age club. She sold it to the Pollock's in early 2004.



Smith Parish Hardware at 2 South Main Street, Portville, N.Y., Circa 1900