

# Hi Michaels, at 80, reflects on a Market gone by

By Susan Snyder

**FLY CREEK**—Almost 10 years ago, Howard P. Michaels sold Michaels Market, the Main street Cooperstown store that had been in his family for more than a century.

Through the years, Michaels has kept the memories of his beginnings at the family market as a delivery boy to his eventual sole ownership. He even compiled a written account of the market's growth from the begin-

ning to the end to pass down to future generations.

Now, the native Cooperstonian is retired and living in Fly Creek. Two weeks ago he celebrated his 80th birthday in Laurens with his family around him.

The day before the party he spent time with a visitor rattling off memories of his years as the worker, co-owner and eventually sole owner of Michael's Market, a business that he said his great-grandfather, Neahemiah, started in 1873 and that had passed down from fathers to sons for four generations.

Michaels began his first day in the market beside his father, Howard N., when he was 12-years-old in 1917. His friends and family called him "Hi" to distinguish him from his father. He said they tried to call him "little Howard," but he put an end to that.

Every day after school at 3:30 p.m., Hi Michaels, the eldest of six children, would go to work in the market cutting meat, waiting on customers or making deliveries—the latter of the three jobs proved to be the most eventful throughout his career at the

market.

He said he worked until 6 p.m. five days a week and until 11 p.m. Saturdays, adding "when the movies got out at half past nine, some farmers would pick up their meat. We had to stay open to sell to them."

Michaels earned \$3 a week, plus room, board and washing. "The money was really gravy—my spending money," he said, adding that he didn't have to worry about spending his money in bars because of prohibition. "If you wanted to go out dancing, you went to Cherry Valley, or upstairs in the village library, but there was no liquor," he said. "If a girl smelled liquor on your breath, she wouldn't dance with you. Now the girls have to get pie-eyed to dance with you."

He remembers his first delivery in the family truck, an Overland. Michaels was just 12-years-old, but he said that didn't matter because a driver's license wasn't required in those days.

The lake roads weren't paved and as wide as they are today, so one of the Michaels or a hired cutter had to make winter deliveries through the

mounds of snow on horseback. At least, that's the way most deliveries started and ended.

Michaels recalls one exception. "I took a five-pound pail of lard to Mrs. Tom Brady," he said. "I put the horse's head almost right up in the doorway so I didn't have to weight him down." Weighting a horse down meant convincing it that it was tied up by strapping a weight around its head.

Mrs. Brady invited him in for some of the fresh batch of cookies she had made and a cup of tea, Michaels said, adding that he couldn't resist and went inside for a few minutes.

And when he came back out—the horse was gone.

Michaels ran back to the stable, about four blocks from the store, and luckily found the horse, which had managed to find its way home.

When the snow was extremely deep, Michaels said he had to deliver the meat in a basket he put on his arm. He recalls a delivery he made to a customer who expected him to bring the meat to the back door on the lower floor, a custom Michaels Market generally followed since many of the "rich



(Photo—The Freeman's Journal)

**HOWARD and Jane Michaels relax at home in Fly Creek.**

people" had dumbwaiters in the basement that would then transport the dinners up to the kitchen.

But this particular time the snow was too deep so Michaels took the meat to the front door, and the woman

remarked, "Young man, don't you know where my back door is," according to Michaels. "I said, 'yes, I do. But the snow's too deep. Do you want the

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meat or not?"

She said 'yes' and accepted it with a colder attitude than the winter wind blowing in Michael's face, but this incident was an exception, he added.

Generally, "the customers were more friendly back then," he said of his earlier days in business. "They didn't think they were above you. They were your friends."

After Michaels graduated from high school in 1925, he said he began working from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. five days a week and until 11 p.m. Saturdays. Customers, such as the Clarks, Coopers and Bowers, would place orders for the noon meal in the morning, which he said was considered the main dinner, and sometimes called for supper meats in the afternoon.

Michaels explained that people used ice for refrigeration in those days and didn't have room to store the meats. For this reason, Michaels Market had to make deliveries at a rigorous pace.

But the Michaels family still had time to whip up its famous "pan sausage," which he says they were known for throughout New York State. "We bought pigs from Pierstown and Middlefield and made the sausage with a special recipe," Michaels said, adding, with a furtive smile, that he couldn't release any culinary details.

But the Michaels sausage became



MICHAELS Market in its early days.

extinct when Michaels went out of business in 1976. "I couldn't stand it [working] anymore," he said with a note of regret in his voice. "I couldn't lift or stand on my feet, and I didn't have anyone to take over for me."

Although his market has closed, as many other independent grocers have in the wake of chain stores, he has continued some hobbies he did even when he was in business and started others. And he already has strung a long line of accomplishments throughout his life.

He was president of the Chamber of Commerce, president of the Leatherstocking Stamp Club, master of the Masonic Lodge and even president of the Pigeon Association. He explained that he has raised pigeons since 1938 and shipped them out to be displayed at various contests around

the United States.

He also does skeet shooting, grouse hunting and collects and sells guns, some dating back to 1858-82.

But every now and then, Michaels days at the market come back to him. When one of his old customers-friends stops him on the street to say, "Mr. Michaels we miss that good meat you used to have," he smiles and remembers the chats with the cooks who invited him in for tea and cookies on his deliveries, the horse who ran away and making the sausage, a family recipe.