In the convenience age, there are still a few of them around Acadiana. You can actually find their addresses in the Yellow Pages. But they are few and far between in this day of Wal-Mart and super stores and a modern mind set that values the speed of a convenience store over the ambience of a general store.

If you are too busy during the week to discover a general store, do it on a Sunday-driving weekend. Half the fun of getting to these stores is the ride, which can take you down winding country roads and through historic areas of small towns. Load up for the ride with a wallet-full of cash, a tank of gas and a shopping list of items you normally couldn't find in a lifetime.

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Harry Broussard with his homemade swing blade.

Here are two popular functioning general stores that still exist in New Iberia—Ackal's on Washington Street and Broussard's on East Main. Broussard's, pictured here, has the look and feel of a genuine old-fashioned country store. It sits under an oak tree and has the old Evangeline Maid front screen doors. Before you even walk into Broussard's, its wonderful smell makes you think of your grandfather's house.

Broussard's is chocked full of stuff. You could call it cluttered. And in all the clutter, you can locate those hard-to-find things, like cane knives, that make shopping at old general stores so special.
One of the finest functioning old general stores in Acadiana is located in the country community of Palmetto. Budden's was established by Allen Budden in 1934 during the Depression, and it has never closed. During the Depression years, it catered to local farmers and sold them wagon parts, plows and work clothes. The store is now operated by Budden's children, Guyton Budden and Laura Allegood.

Budden's is the kind of place that makes your eyes get as big with wonder as a kid's when you walk inside. It still has its original oak floor and pressed tin roof. There's a hardware section that even includes an area with a work bench, where Guyton in his overalls repairs chain saws and weed eaters for customers while they wait. The general store also has a fabric department and a meat counter. For service in the meat department, ring a cowbell attached to a string.

While you won't find plows at Budden's these days, you will find everything from lawnmowers to boudin. "Daddy hated to tell anybody he didn't have anything," says Guyton, who's kept the family tradition of a well-stocked store, "That's why he had a little bit of everything."

Ivy's Grocery in Grand Coteau was originally a candy and ice cream shop when it was first built some 60 years ago. In 1958, it turned into a general store and is now owned and operated by Barbara Angelle. Ivy's used to sell gas, but that got too expensive. "We used to sell more clothes, too," says Angelle. "But now there's Wal-Mart. There's no way you can compete with those stores."

The floors at Ivy's are scuffed and worn, but the pots and pans and appliances for sale on the sparse shelves are dusty because few people buy much at Ivy's anymore except for grocery items. But there is still an atmosphere of a semi-functioning general store here. You can tell that by the wash tubs and rubber boots in the back and the big pickle jar and candy at the counter up front.

Continued on page 14
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CONTINUED ON PAGE 14
Dreyfus has everything from bear traps to Hadacol. Dreyfus Shopping Center in Krotz Springs looks more like a modern general store. A fashionable green awning dresses up the store front, and inside you actually have buggies to push down the aisles. The store is fully stocked with enough grocery items that you could do your weekly shopping here.

But Dreyfus' still has nooks and crannies that reveal its 62 years; for instance, in its hardware department in the back of the store, you can still purchase blasts from the past, like bear traps that customers now buy for catching possums and armadillos.

Foti's sits across the street from the historic St. Martin de Tours Church in downtown St. Martinville. You'd think it'd be a tourist stop because it has a charm about it, but actually mostly locals frequent the store. Foti's first opened in 1917. In the '30s Foti's was a big business in St. Martinville, but after the big chain stores moved to town, all that changed. Today, the store stays open just to give the present owner Rena Foti something to do.
The Old General Store

Chastant & Breaux General Store in Coteau is a little out of the way (it's located on Highway 88 off Highway 167), and the owners are not used to a lot of outsiders (it's the kind of place that if you're new in the area and you walk in, you'll probably get stared at). But don't let that stop you from visiting this authentic wood-frame general store that's open seven days a week and still functions beautifully, complete with veggies, hardware and gasoline.

Mr. Landry, proprietor of Chastant & Breaux, in his favorite chair

Napoli's in Melville passes more for a liquor and convenience store today than a general merchandise store. But Napoli's has managed to maintain much of its original character, like its pressed tin roof and original cash register that's been around since 1915 when the brick store was built. Old shoe boxes on its dust-caked shelves are so worn and faded that you wonder could there actually still be shoes for sale in them, and if so, what in the world might they look like?

Before Huey P. Long became governor, Melville was a boom town due to its cypress logging industry and the fact that it was an important crossway for those traveling east to Baton Rouge and New Orleans. At one time there were seven hotels in the town. Today, Melville is a faint shadow of its past, but stores like Napoli's—where Mitchell and Elsie have been checking out customers at their single counter for almost 50 years—and still keep its past alive.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

The Young P. 130114
Oct 1.
May 17, 1993