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Minkler Cash Store

Charles Ozro Minkler was a 13 year old boy in Iowa when he ran away from home and came to California. He first worked bundling and tying wheat sheaths on his arrival in the valley. Ozro, as he was known, would ultimately become a farmer in the Sanger area.

In 1892 he built a small shack of a store and the area around it became known as "Minkler." The family expanded the town enterprises into a saloon, a blacksmith shop, a livery stable, and a hotel. Located a few miles east of Centerville, the town became a staging point for teams heading into the Kings River watershed area of the mountains.

Ozro married Emma Bailey, and together they had two sons, William Orville Minkler and Charles O. Minkler (who was known as Charlie). Some of the Minkler grandchildren still live in the area.

At some point after 1900, the ATSF railroad built a spur line from Reedley to Piedra (known as Del Piedra). This spur called the ATSF Wahtoke District served the rock quarry at Piedra at its early terminus, and ultimate the line was continued easterly when Pine Flat Dam was under construction. The quarry was a source of track ballast for ATSF, and gravel and rock for Pine Flat dam. At Minkler, the Wahtoke District wyed into the ATSF Porterville-Orosi District, coming from Porterville. This line originated just north of Bakersfield and served many east valley towns including Porterville, Strathmore, Lindsay, Exeter, Woodlake, Seville, Cutler, Orosi, Orange Cove, and Minkler. This provided

access to national markets for locally grown agricultural goods.

In 1920, Ozro Minkler built a new, bigger store next to the small store. This store would sell nearly everything a farming family might need from groceries to Red Crown Gasoline and Sierra Ice Cream. Meat, cheese, canned goods, all had a special place. Of course, beer was also sold there, and the store still retains a special license that allows them to sell beer and have patrons drink their beer in the store.

Additions to the new store would include an adobe ice house and wooden bait house, which are both still standing today, although the ice house was damaged and moved several feet backward after a car hit it in the 1970's. Ice was purchased from the ice house in Sanger in 300 lb. blocks that were perforated into blocks. When someone wanted to buy ice, the store clerks would chip away at the perforations with an ice pick until the blocks were separated from the large block. Red worms were available in the bait house, for fishing. The store would also serve as the Minkler post office for many years.

Ozro ran the store with his son William until 1935 when Ozro died. William continued to run the store until about 1940 when the store business was sold to Grace Russell. Grace leased the building from the Minklers, but owned the business.

In 1970, Silvia Ashcraft bought the business from Grace Russell. She also leased the land from the Charlie Minkler (Ozro's grandson), until about 1978 when she purchased the entire town. The name "Minkler Cash Market" was always stipulated in the lease arrangement, and could never be changed.

This was a “cash” store, meaning that you could buy things there using money. Credit was given to certain local farm families. But this was not a “trading post.” You couldn’t trade their goods for farm products, as you could in some stores, hence the name Minkler CASH Store.

Many of the shelves in the store are original to 1920. The counter was added sometime in the 1940’s by Grace Russell’s husband, before he left her claiming that this business was too much work.

The current owner is Mary Novack, who is Silvia Ashcraft’s daughter. She ran the store with her mom, grandma, and sisters back in the 1970’s. The store was then open all day seven days a week. At one point, Mary was scheduled to work on a Sunday, but she had a date that day. No one else was going to be available, so Mary begged her mom to let her have the day off. Her sisters also argued her case, and Silvia finally relented and allowed the store to be closed. For the first time in over 50 years of operation, the store closed that Sunday, and has never opened on a Sunday again.

In 2004, Silvia Ashcraft put the whole town up for sale on eBay. The asking price was \$600,000. Silvia was 83 at the time and was in failing health, so she decided to part with the property. Happily for us, no one ponied up the money and the family still runs it to this day. The store has been run exclusively by women since 1940.

To this day, Minkler Cash Store is a cash store. They don’t take credit cards.