

A Short History of Langlois, Oregon Grocers

(Bonnie Jensen Cox, 09/11/21)

In 1854 and succeeding years, William V. Langlois filed land claims and purchased property north of Floras Creek, creating an amalgam of acreage for a family farm.¹ William had previously owned a mercantile in Port Orford but desired a home on Floras Creek for his wife and seven children.² One of his neighbors was A. H.

(Alexander Hamilton) Thrift

who shared similar agribusiness goals and had amassed 840 acres on the same fertile plain shored by the Pacific Ocean. Through influence and investment, both families would play an integral role in the upstart of grocers that would feed and supply the clientele of northern Curry County and its peripheral areas.

In 1881 A. H. Thrift and wife Mary donated three tracts of land to develop a town east of their ranch that would be named "Dairyville," but it was not until 1889 that the couple filed a cadastral map with the Curry County clerk. Interestingly, the same year the plat was filed, A. H. Thrift and Frank Langlois placed an ad in the *Bandon Recorder* referring to their mercantile in "Langlois"---not Dairyville. Precedent to their in-town location, Francis "Frank" M. Langlois (third son of William V. and Mary) operated a general



Above right is Langlois general merchandise store with post office established by A. H. Thrift and Frank Langlois, which they later sold to Ed Rackleff who lost it in the 1910 fire.

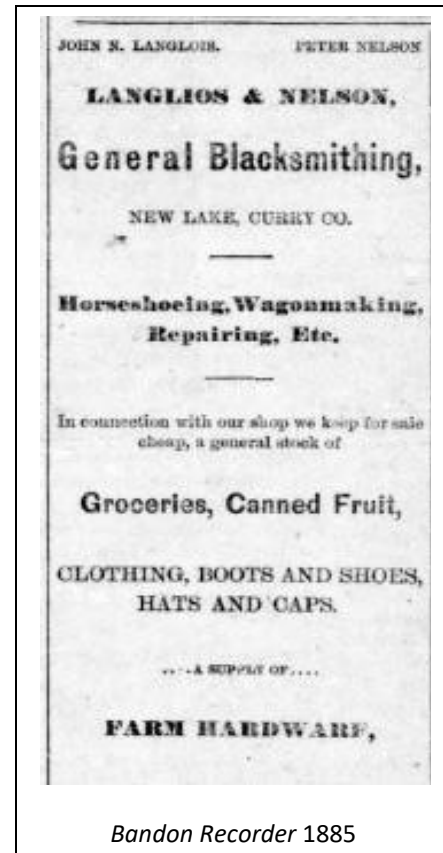
(from *Langlois 1881-1981*)



Bandon Recorder, Dec. 1889

store in a building on the family ranch about one mile west of today's town of Langlois. Nearby, Frank's brother James and partner Peter Nelson operated a similar mercantile on the Langlois family's New Lake property.

A. H. Thrift and F. M. Langlois (business partners a generation apart) shared a vested interest in establishing their proposed store on the newborn town's main road. In April of 1881 Frank received a federal appointment that qualified him to become postmaster.³ Adjacent to the store that the two men financed was the post office--- "Langlois Post Office"--- the name derived from the surname of its postmaster. Though "Dairyville" was the referenced name of the town for three decades, by 1912 the name of the farm village had morphed to "Langlois," and the name "Dairyville" had become a footnote.⁴



In 1899, Thrift and Langlois sold their store to Edward Rackleff who became postmaster for the town in 1901. Rackleff was elected joint representative for Coos and Curry Counties in 1906, and would hire stand-ins to clerk for him during legislative sessions in Salem. In 1910, his store with post office was destroyed by fire along with much of the town's west-side business district. Edgar Thrift (son of A. H. and Mary Thrift) bought the salvaged stock from Rackleff and rebuilt the store on the same site, officially re-opening it in 1912. Like Frank Langlois and Ed Rackleff before him, Edgar Thrift became the town's postmaster, a position he held for nearly a decade.

In 1918, the Sweet brothers (W. J. and Arthur, sons of Nova Scotia immigrants John and Susan Sweet) bought the Langlois general store with post office from Edgar Thrift. Eventually, a third brother, Alfred J. (aka "Sally") would join them in their enterprise. Arthur Sweet served as postmaster for several years and Al

Sweet was designated "acting postmaster."⁵ Al was petite in stature and remembered as a gregarious merchant with an "easy smile." Annabelle (Strain) Haga remembers the first-of-the-month trips to the



Sweet Bros. sign adorns the store front circa 1930. At left is Larue Corrick (later Larue Henry) with her parents Mary (nee Cheever) and Clyde Corrick. (Bandon History Museum)

grocery store with her father and sisters, their mission to pay the family's grocery bill. She waited patiently, knowing that after business had been transacted Mr. Sweet would treat each child to a piece of candy.

Down the street from Sweets' enterprise was competition from Walter and Mollie Hood whose store with meats and groceries was housed on the ground floor of the former W.O.W. (Woodmen of the World) building, the

upstairs utilized for living quarters. Though the Hoods advertised the business they had established in 1936 as a "thriving grocery and meat market," by the end of 1941 the couple had suspended operations. In 1942, Arthur and Marguerite Blanche Kane purchased the W.O.W. hall and continued the grocery for a while, but by 1947 they had phased it into a dry goods store. Because of the Kanes' proprietorship, many Langlois residents refer to the "W.O.W. building" as the



Ad from 1941 LHS yearbook enhanced for clarity.

"Kane building." In 2021 the building is the business place for Rain Coast Arts owned by Carol Waxham and Thomas Medlin

Also putting the squeeze on A. J. Sweet's mercantile was competition one block north where Andrew "Ole" Olsen had a small grocery fronted with "visible" Signal gas pumps that he established circa 1917. A few years later, Johnny



Langlois Market in 1940's at the corner of 2nd Street and Hwy 101
from *Langlois 1881-1981*
(Langlois Centennial Committee)

and Ruby James operated Olsen's tiny grocery as well as an auto repair garage next door---- the precursor to Aldropp's Garage that started in 1932.⁶

Throughout its history, Olsen's mini mart seemed caught up in a continuous cycle of revolving ownership. Between 1917 and 1948, the store sequentially went from original owner Andrew Olsen to Les Hutton (who ranched on Willow Creek); to Johnny and Ruby James in 1929; back to Olsen in 1938; then on to Vera and Charles Chesley (who ranched in the Langlois hills); and finally to Frank Moore in 1948. With Aldropp's pumping gas next door, plus Richfield pumps in front of Cheever Hardware and pumps at Denmark Store three miles south, the



OLSEN'S
Service Station
and
Grocery Store

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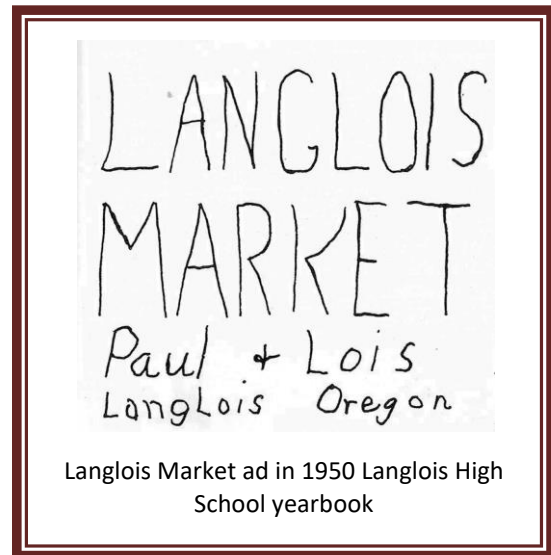
ON ALL

YOUR BUYS"

LANGLOIS OREGON

gasoline market was saturated and the visible pumps in front of Olsen's mini-mart removed.⁷

In 1946, Al Sweet (by then apparently sole owner of the business that carried his name) sold the store and inventory to Lois and Paul Smith. Lois, formerly a school teacher at Prosper northeast of Bandon, was appointed the town's first female postmaster in 1943, a position she held for 34 years. The Smiths named their mercantile, "Langlois Market," and when they sold the business and leased the building to Ray and Ethel Boston in May of 1951, the name continued. Two weeks following transfer of ownership from Smiths



to Bostons, both the store and post office accessible from inside the store were robbed, the looter(s) gaining entrance by forcing the building's rear door then lifting merchandise and burgling the postal safe. In 1955, Ray Boston was hired to build a new free-standing facility for the post office at 2nd and Jackson.

Ray and Ethel operated Langlois Market for twenty years. Son Lanny remembers his mother as an astute, industrious business woman. Ethel was solicitous in her display of merchandise, staging chilled sodas and beer immediately right of the store's main entrance, magazines and comic books to the left.⁸ To find meats, produce, and dairy the customer needed to walk from the front of the store toward the rear----thus assuring that the shopper would have opportunity to survey the store's inventory. Many former shoppers remember the heavily oiled dark fir floors pocked and punctured by the caulked boots of loggers and mill workers.

Some of the meats displayed were purchased wholesale in halves or quarters, then cut or ground by Ethel or Ray for retail. Lanny (later Bandon's fire chief) helped tally the accounts receivable when he was old enough, and reconciled the till at day's end. He also kept the beverage machines stocked.

The Bostons lived behind and above the store. Ray, a carpenter by trade, used his multiple building skills to convert a portion of a warehouse attached to the store's west side into a comfortable apartment. Upstairs sleeping quarters were divided from an additional stock storage area. Like all residents in the community their phone number was short---181.

In the 1950's, Bostons' Langlois Market was in competition with Dinty's on the north end of town. Its owners, Frank Moore (a retired civil engineer) and wife Nana first housed their little market in Andrew Olsen's vacated grocery while Frank and his brother Leslie built a new store next door---the building that houses today's Langlois Market. Signage displayed on the store's front attests to its date of origin: "Established in 1949".⁹

Dinty's Red and White (part of a franchise of small grocery stores) had a grand opening in its new quarters in May of 1950. Entrance to the store sat within thirty feet of Highway 101, the county's main thoroughfare. In 1952 a near calamity occurred when a trailer



Ethel Boston, proprietor, washing the windows of Langlois Market in late 1950's.

(Courtesy Lanny and Mary Boston)



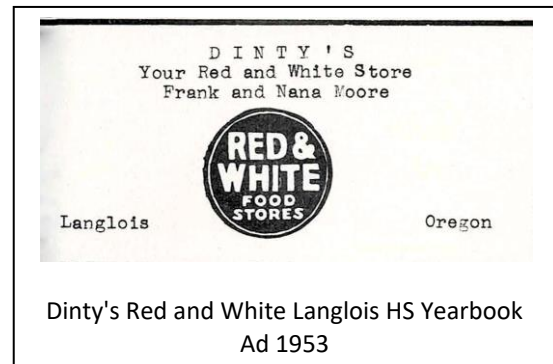
School children are standing in front of the building that had once housed Olsen's Grocery. Behind them is Dinty's Red and White Market. Circa 1952

being towed by a car driven by a local resident became detached from its hitch and careened through the front plate glass windows. There were no personal injuries, but there was substantial damage to the store.

In 1956 the Moores sold their store, then one year later they "repurchased" it and once again became sole owners. In March of 1960, Bostons bought Dinty's Red and White from the retiring Moores and supplanted it with "Langlois Market," thus vacating the Smith's building.

In 1966 a fire gutted the unoccupied building that had once housed Ethel and Ray's first market on the block's northeast corner. Adjacent to it was a café, and on the southeast end of the block was a tavern. Immediately south of that was the Cheever Building where Lute and Larue Henry offered general merchandise, sporting goods, and automotive repairs. Ethel Boston first noticed the early-morning flames visible from her kitchen window, their dwelling now a large house located

behind their new Langlois Market site. She hurriedly phoned Archie Aldropp who manned the town's fire truck then contacted business owners until a burned telephone pole collapsed the town's phone service. It was only through the resourceful use of a hose connected to the Langlois Water System that Carl Evans (shielded by a sheet of plywood) watered down and saved the Cheever building while Lute and Larue Henry and various good Samaritans frantically extracted essential business papers and inventory from their threatened livelihood. Because of those communal efforts, the building still stands in 2021. The Cheever Building is basically a storage facility today, but the attached annex that Lute



The Langlois Tavern that burned in the 1966 fire sat directly north of Cheever Hardware. To the right of the tavern there had been a restaurant, and to the right of it was the building that housed the post office and original "Langlois Market."

Henry added in 1946 to service autos and the farm machinery he sold now contains the Floras Creek Coffee Company.

After Bostons twenty-year run, the next owners of Langlois Market were Rod and Sandi Sabin who purchased the business in 1971. Rod and Sandi ranched and were raising three little boys during their period of ownership. Sabins sold the business to Sandi's parents, Evelyn (nee DeHaven) and John Bjerg in 1975. Evelyn and John also ranched, and John trucked for Tucker Sawmill. In November of 1978, the Bjergs sold the business to Sue (Sweet) and Lee (Leland) Pestana. Sue and Lee had been school teachers in Hawaii before moving on to Fort Worth where Lee coached basketball at Texas Christian University and worked for an oil company. When the Pestanas decided to leave Texas they considered their options: Return to the big island of Hawaii where they had been offered teaching positions, or move to Langlois where Lee's father-in-law, Piercy Sweet, had heard by word of mouth that the Bjergs were interested in selling the market.

It was under Pestanas' ownership that the original store was first expanded, the parking lot paved, and the deli started. In 1981 the Pestanas hired Langlois carpenter Art Sypher and assistant John Unican to essentially double the building's square footage. Lumber for that project was purchased from Dick and Kitty Tucker's sawmill where their fifteen-man crew specialized in cutting Port Orford cedar and Douglas fir that shipped to worldwide markets.



Perhaps the birth of the store's deli was a case of the tail wagging the *dawg*. It had been the practice of previous owners to buy readymade sandwiches from a traveling vendor so that a lunch could quickly be had for local workers, primarily from Tucker Sawmill. When the sandwich supplier announced he was retiring his route, Muriel Sweet (mother of Sue and mother-in-law to Lee) suggested the couple sell high end hotdogs accessorized with her homemade mustard sauce, "Everyone likes my mustard recipe," she assured them. The hotdogs were an immediate success and as of 2021 the little market had sold well over a million dawgs, some days serving in excess of 400.

With time the deli menu was expanded to include designer sandwiches christened with names like the *Higgins*, *Cransan*, *Hammer*, and the *McLeland*, appropriately named for store owner Leland Pestana. When Lee Pestana and Sue Sweet's son, Jacob, assumed ownership of the business in 2012, his top priorities were expansion of the parking lot and a second till for



Joseph Pestana, Uli Lau, and Jacob Pestana circa 1983. (Photo courtesy Jacob Pestana)



Father and son entrepreneurs, Jacob and Leland Pestana 2021. (Photo by Nancy Jensen)

handling the swelling noontime traffic.

In 2019, Jacob applied for a liquor license and hired his childhood friend Joel Deets to build a liquor store annex on the north side of the building. Lumber for the project was purchased from another Langlois childhood friend of Jacob, Uli Lau, CEO of "Oregon Overseas Lumber Company" located south of Bandon. Today, the market thrives. Jacob Pestana is also owner of "The Spoon," a restaurant that ironically sits on the site of the original Langlois Market.

And so from grassroots sowed and cultivated for more than 140 years, the "village" of Langlois, containing approximately 130 citizens in 2021, takes pride in its flourishing Langlois Market worthy of world famous recognition.



(Photo by John Jensen)

¹ In 1854, Wm. Langlois's land was actually in Coos County. In 1855, Curry County was created from the southern portion of Coos County and a western slice of Jackson County, thereby putting the Langlois family's land in Curry. Subsequent revisions were made to Curry's northern boundary in 1872 and 1951, and to its eastern boundary (by then buffeted by Jefferson County) in 1880 and 1927.

² In the 1860 U. S. Census, the family name is spelled L-a-n-g-l-e-s-s, a likely clue as to the pronunciation of the 1847 Guernsey Island immigrant's surname. In those days, a census enumerator would contact families in person and might phonetically record names.

³ In 1887, Frank Langlois's business partner Alexander Thrift also met the qualifications for U. S. postmaster and served in that capacity until 1897, at which time Frank resumed duties. J. H. Upton alleges that the first post office was actually on the Langlois family's ranch and was moved into Dairyville a year later. (*Oregon Journal*, 1927)

⁴ It is fairly common lore that U. S. postal authorities asked the postmaster of Dairyville to change its postal name due to confusion sorting mail for Dayville in Grant County, eastern Oregon. Louis Knapp told the story in an article he submitted to *The World* in Coos Bay published Oct. 26, 1974. An additional article in the Sept. 27, 1975 edition of *The World* gives a similar explanation, adding that the name change officially happened in 1891. J.H. Upton endorsed the explanation in a story for Bandon's *Western World*, Dec. 14, 1916, and there is additional confirmation in the June 28th and July 1st 1927 editions of the *Oregon Journal*. Finally, in the book *Langlois 1881-1981* the explanation is reiterated on page 2. Sorting the mail for Dairyville may have been further complicated by the fact that there was also a Dairyville in Eastern Oregon (1870) which later became Hardman....which later became a ghost town.

⁵ Wm. J. Sweet is current owner Jacob Pestana's great grandfather. Alfred J. Sweet and Arthur P. Sweet are his great uncles. Wm. J. Sweet and wife Theresa were parents of A.W. "Bill," Piercy, and Donald Sweet as well as two daughters---Anne (Felsheim), and Helen (Mayes). Piercy is Sue Sweet's father and Jacob Pestana's grandfather. Arthur Sweet and wife Docia owned the Arizona Inn north of today's Prehistoric Gardens 11 miles south of Port Orford. William J. Sweet dairied at Sixes and became very involved in the banking business in Bandon from which he retired in 1959.

⁶ In 1984, the former garage became the site of B & B Farm Supply.

⁷ The building that housed Olsen's grocery still exists in 2021, though it has been turned on its axis and sits at an angle to today's Langlois Market. The store was owned and operated by Danish immigrant Andrew Olsen in 1918 and has variously housed a small grocery, barber shop, thrift store and likely other small enterprises. Andrew dabbled in other business ventures in Portland, Bandon, and Denmark (OR), his absence perhaps accounting for the series of owners that kept the little market running until 1949. In the 1930's, Otto Heckle also ran a small station with visible gas pumps approximately one mile north of Langlois.

⁸ In the 1950's, comic books and magazines had a shelf life, and when that time expired the front covers were torn off and sent to the distributor for redemption. Lucky was the child who shared in the spoils of those coverless publications.

⁹ Port Orford also had a Red and White Market in the 40's and 50's. In 1948, it was owned by the Wilsons, and in 1950 it was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Norm Morsing. Other Red and White grocery outlets on the south coast of Oregon were located in Empire, Lakeside, Arago, Coos Bay, Charleston, Bridge, North Bend, Powers, Riverton, Sixes, Nesika Beach and Reedsport.

MEDIA RESOURCES:

1. BLM General Land Office Records
2. *Floras Creek Precinct*, Patti Strain
3. *The World* Newspaper
4. *The Panther*, Langlois High School Yearbook, 1938, 1950
5. Appointments of US Postmasters 1832-1971
6. *Pioneer Histories of Coos and Curry Counties* Orville Dodge
7. *Langlois 1881-1891*, Langlois Centennial Committee
8. *Bandon Recorder* Newspaper
9. *The Oregonian* Newspaper
10. *The Western World* Newspaper
11. *Dairy Ranch Rhymes, Christmas Poems and Sweet Family Yarns* by William John Sweet, Caxton Printers, Ltd. 1961.
12. *The Oregon Journal*
13. Oregon Secretary of State Website:
<https://sos.oregon.gov/archives/records/county/Pages/curry-history.aspx>

PEOPLE RESOURCES:

1. Bobby and Dick Everest
2. Judy Jensen Snyder
3. John and Nancy Jensen
5. Sandi Bjerg Sabin
6. Evelyn Dehaven Bjerg
7. Milt Smith
8. Lanny Boston
9. Leland Pestana
10. Dee Silacci
11. Annabelle Haga
12. Jacob Pestana
13. Yvonne Pettijohn, *Curry Historical Society*
14. June Sabin
15. Lila Kirchgesler

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