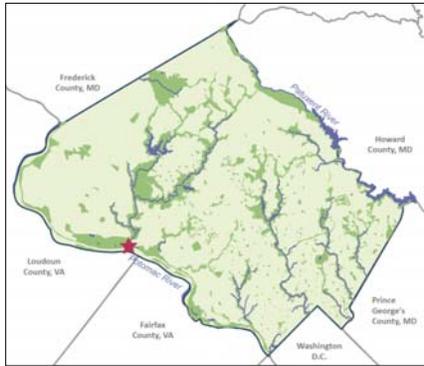


SENECA STORE



Current map of Montgomery County. Seneca, identified by the star, sits at the edge of Agricultural Reserve. Created in 1981, the Agricultural Reserve protects over 93,000 acres of farmland.

the C & O Canal at Riley’s Lock that he rented from Mr. Gunnell. The location of that store right of the canal, however, made it vulnerable to flooding from the rising waters of the Potomac.

In 1900, Allnutt purchased the house at 16401 Old River Road from Wilson Tschiffely, the operator of the old Seneca Mill. The house had been built earlier than Tschiffely’s tenure, dating back to ca. 1855, constructed by Upton Darby, who, with his son John, had been prior owners and operators of the Seneca Mill. This grain mill, located on the south side of River Road, west of the route to the canal, remained a fixture of the community’s mercantile life until 1931, and then stood as a landmark of Seneca until its demolition in 1959. While retaining operation of the mill, it was Tschiffely who sold the old Upton Darby House to Frederick Allnutt in 1900.

Within a year, Allnutt built his new gable-front, general store on Old River Road beside his new place of residence. The property also included a two story barn/stable and a springhouse. Allnutt and his wife, Ada Perry, moved into the five-bay house with front porch not long after their wedding in October 1900. Christened “Evermay,” by Ada, the Allnutts raised three children: Eleanor, Hilda, and Frederick Jr.

Seneca Mills was a small farming center established in 1732 that thrived because of its access to the Potomac River and the C & O Canal, the latter being one of the greatest transportation feats of the pre-railroad era. Seneca contained schools, churches, large homes, stores, hotels, and mills. The Seneca Store, now known as Poole’s Store, is at the heart of that rural community history.

Built in 1901, the Seneca Store was constructed by its original proprietor, Dawsonville-born resident Frederick Augustus Allnutt. Already an experienced merchant, Allnutt had operated a general store in a building fronting



The Original Allnutt Store operated near Lock No. 24 by Frederick A. Allnutt, ca. 1900. Image Courtesy: Montgomery County Historical Society.



SENECA STORE



Local examples of early 20th century commercial architecture in Montgomery County, emphasized a spacious first floor for merchandise and an ample front porch for socializing customers. The H.C. Darby Store, seen left, is also maintained by M-NCPPC Montgomery County Department of Parks.

Allnutt's Store functioned similarly to the other general stores found throughout Montgomery County. This two-and-a-half-story wood and frame building originally had counters on both sides of the first floor, and was heated by a pot-bellied stove. By 1910, only three general stores were located in the 6th District, and Allnutt was the retail wholesaler in Seneca.

If you needed supplies in Seneca, you purchased them from the Allnutt Store. In a 1971 letter, William Prettyman noted that when the Seneca Club was initiated, it was Frederick Allnutt who supplied "a sufficient quantity of chestnut lumber to erect a cottage at the mouth of Seneca Creek" in 1912. An account of Allnutt's store inventory revealed he sold a little bit of everything...Chicago Tailoring Company, Bagby Furniture, Armour and Company, Neudecker Tobacco Company, Maryland Biscuit Company, American Drug Company, Union Candy Company, International Harvester, Liberty Stone Works, Hamilton Brown Shoe Company, Chapin Sacks Manufacturing Company, Mishawanka Woolen Manufacturing Company, and Standard Oil Company. Allnutt even had a phone line, serviced by

Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company.

Even with a relatively remote location, the Seneca Store was a known destination. In a 1914 *Washington Post* article, readers were encouraged to leave the comforts of the District of Columbia and take a scenic drive out to Seneca, where the possibilities of a good catch while fishing in the Potomac made the trip worthwhile. Exactly 26 miles from our nation's capital, travelers would "turn right over the bridge over Seneca Creek to Seneca Store on right at [the] far end of [the] bridge." Upon approaching



A shipping crate addressed to F. A. Allnutt. This material was used to create the finished walls of the upstairs floor of the store.



SENECA STORE

Seneca, readers were cautioned, “Seneca in the eyes of the local motorist is the ‘jumping off’ place, there being nothing to welcome the visitor but the general storekeeper at the crossroads.” That welcoming face belonged to Frederick Allnutt.

After his death in 1915, Frederick Allnutt’s son-in-law, Guy Allnutt, continued to operate the store. Local residents came to the shop not only for necessities, but more importantly, to fetch mail, as Guy – just like Frederick Allnutt – served as Postmaster for Seneca. The Allnutt Store replaced the Tschiffely Mill as the local post office. The store, like the rest of the community, was electrified in 1934, an improvement that did not reach most Americans until the 1935 creation of the Rural Electric Administration, a New Deal initiative to bring power to non-urban sections of the United States.

As the county sought to improve roads for county residents, the Allnutt Store was facing the prospect of being bypassed by progress. Transportation officials proposed widening and moving the one-lane bridge over Seneca Creek 50 yards downstream while raising it 45 feet higher, thereby making the store inaccessible as it would sit at the bottom of a large embankment. County engineers defended their case to protest by saying that water damage from Seneca Creek would continue unless change occurred, but residents replied, “they wouldn’t mind an occasional flood.”

By 1963, Guy began to rent the store, first to Mr. H.V. Pointer. It was during Pointer’s tenure that building was remodeled into a “self-service store” where customers could personally select items at their leisure.

Less than two years later, in 1965 Allnutt turned the reins of the family business over to Raymond E. and Frances “Billy” Williams Poole. Raymond had been working for Allnutt since December 1947, after his father sold the family farm, and the same month that he married Billy.



The trademark shop sign for the Poole’s Store

The Allnutts were never far away from the store, as they continued to reside in the adjacent house. Just as Frederick Allnutt faced the dilemmas of Mother Nature on the canal, Guy Allnutt confronted Hurricane Agnes in June 1972. Of the 65 homes along the Seneca Creek, 11 were destroyed after Agnes. The destructive nature of this storm was not easily forgotten by Billy Poole, who told the



SENECA STORE

Sentinel in 1979: “Before 1971...there hadn’t been a flood here for 30 years, but that fall came one that no one will forget. I couldn’t imagine that sleepy little crick could be such a menace.” By this time, the Allnutts were in their retirement years and keeping up the store became challenging. The inability to secure loans or flood insurance to protect these historic resources motivated Guy and Hilda Allnutt to sell both the house and store to M-NCPPC in 1976. By lease agreement, the Poole family was able to keep the doors open to this little country store.

Family operations at the store continued, with all six children of Raymond and Billy working with their parents to make the store a thriving business. Raymond was committed to the store, “You’re here at the store 6 days a week, and working on the books the 7th. It takes patience and getting along with customers.” Billy, in turn loved what she did at the store, “It’s fun working here. No way I could do it if I didn’t like it.”



Southern States will continue to have a presence at the store. The Poole’s Store acted as a local distributor of agricultural supplies for this nationwide cooperative.

Despite the rise of big-box stores, local citizens, hunters, recreational enthusiasts, and travelers alike have continued to patronize Poole’s Store – finding everything from hot dogs and soda to horse supplies and animal feed. Folks came to hear Raymond’s infectious laugh, other came to hear witty lines from Billy...when customers declined paper bags, she responded, “Good, save a tree.” The family worked hard to make Poole’s Store the oldest general store in continuous operation in Montgomery County.

At the turn of the last century, the Allnutt Store was one of over a 100 general stores found throughout Montgomery County, but as the Seneca Store celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2001, there were less than 25 of these local mercantile operations that remained. Because of their significant value to the legacy of this community, both the Upton Darby House and the Poole’s Store are listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Seneca Historic District. Both resources are also protected by the Montgomery County *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*.



Oil paintings of the Poole’s Store (left) and the Upton Darby House (right) by Robinwyn D. Lewis at <http://www.robinwyn.com>.

