Donation of the Month

Kroger Grocery Co. shelves
2011.2
Donor: Randy Shofner

We take going to the grocery store for granted. We stop by on the way home to pick up essentials like bread, milk and eggs or we stop to get dinner from the frozen food cooler or from the deli. It wasn't always so easy. Making a meal used to take all day from catching the chicken and de-feathering to finally placing it in the oven to cook. Some items did come from the local general store such as canned beans or wheat flour, but your choices were limited and you relied on the clerk to bag and price what you purchased. The first self-service grocery store was Piggly Wiggly which opened in Memphis, TN in 1916.

Until the introduction of the self-service store, early grocery stores worked like the general store. One brought in a list and the clerk gathered, bagged and priced your purchases for you. This was time consuming and expensive, so the owner of Piggly Wiggly introduced the concept of self-service shopping Food sitting on open shelves, baskets to hold your purchases and not a clerk in sight allowed shoppers to move through the store and pick out their own purchases.

Based on the Piggly Wiggly format grocery stores were revolutionized. And in most cases are not looking back; however, some higher end stores do offer car side pick-up. The use of open shelves like these used in the local Kroger store allowed the new grocery store model to work. A Kroger Grocery store could be found in Rogers from late 1930 through the 1950s. These shelves were salvaged out of a building on West Walnut, where Kroger's operated before moving to North 2nd Street in the 1950s.

Kroger Grocery Co. started in 1883 in Cincinnati, OH. Kroger's revolutionized the grocery shopping experience as well by introducing meat and groceries under one roof. Prior to this idea most groceries only sold canned or bakery items preferring to leave the meat selling to the local butcher. He also introduced the concept of "corporate brands". He would over buy a product and turn it into another product to sell in the store. While it was started as a way to boost profits; today, it has become a staple with modern grocery stores.

These are only two of the early grocery stores to make an impact on the modern grocery shopping experience. Without the entrepreneurs behind these companies our weekly shopping experience could be vastly different. Grocery stores haven't stopped evolving as consumer tastes, needs and wants change constantly.