



Since 1894!

by Dianna Troyer

Phyllis Tracy of Elba always wanted to travel the world, but now she doesn't have to leave home to fulfill her dream.

In the last several years, the world has been coming to *her*, in her tiny country store in Almo, population 40.

"I don't have to travel now. They come in here," said Phyllis, who has been running the family store for about 10 years. "It's really interesting to visit with them. Many cultures are represented. It's very educational for us."

Rock climbers who come to the City of Rocks National Reserve, four miles away, stop at her store for freshly-baked cinnamon rolls, pies, burritos, hamburgers with home-made buns, miscellaneous supplies, groceries, guidebooks or a hot shower for \$2.50.

International and national climbers and tourists have signed the guest book which she gladly shares with visitors. There are signatures of climbers from Iceland, Japan, Poland, Germany, Australia, New Zealand More than 80,000 people visited the world-renowned Reserve in 1990, according



to National Park Service statistics, including people from 14 different countries and 49 different states.

Many of these people naturally stop at Tracy's General Store, a distinctive red-brick building in the center of town with a sign on one side proudly proclaiming, "Tracy's General Store since 1894."

Phyllis learns of different customs and attitudes from her visitors, and in return shares part of her culture at the store, where she's organizing historic displays of the pioneer lifestyle.

The store has operated continuously since it opened in 1894, and one or another member of the pioneering Tracy family has always run it. Phyllis' husband Bill is a grandson of William Tracy, who opened the store with his brother Harry. They hauled fresh produce from local ranches to a railroad station about 40 miles away in Utah, and brought back items the ranchers needed. Bill Tracy still operates the family ranch nearby.

"He hates being confined. He likes being outside with his cattle," Phyllis explained.

But Phyllis thrives in the store, where tourists give her a worldwide outlook. "I've always liked people and I think

On the opposite page, Phyllis Tracy waits on customer Thern Ward, in the 98-year-old family store. Not for sale are the many relics of the past, right and below . . . nor the pioneer artifacts, the antique clothing, the old brass cash register or any of the other historic details that make Tracy's Store a feast for the eyes, as well as a welcome oasis for the traveler.



The brick section of the building was added after the log store was operating steadily, and the bricks were kilned in a field behind the store. "You can still see bricks near a willow patch where they built the fire."

Two Swedish masons laid the bricks, but she's uncertain who they were. They laid the bricks in a distinctive European pattern, a series of "V" shapes along the top of the building. Some Swiss and Swedish climbers recognized the design in the bricks as similar to European buildings.

While tourists find the store delightful, local residents rely on it for

they're interesting. Climbers love this store. They say, "Don't change anything!" They're intrigued with the old things I've collected."

A 90-year-old brass register with wooden drawers is still used. Wooden floors squeak as customers walk along aisles, selecting items. A tin paper bag carrier is suspended from the ceiling over the checkout counter, and holds various-sized bags. A rack of antique shoes rests atop a shelf while antique Coca-Cola and 7-Up signs decorate the walls. A metal crimping iron for hair hangs from a wall; her husband's 1948 Navy uniform and his father's World War I Army uniform hang on display . . .

Antique buyers stop in to see if Phyllis is willing to sell any items. "I don't want to sell anything. They think we're just hicks from the sticks, and don't know the value of these items."

In the back section of the store, you can still see the thick logs cut nearly 100 years ago from nearby Almo Canyon to construct the original building. "I left it open to let people see what it looked like." Last spring the store was slightly remodeled and restored. New carpet was laid, and a hole was cut in the floor to see how sound the joists below were.

"They were just as solid as they could be! We found two sets of wood floors running in opposite directions."

Phyllis had considered leaving one log wall with the mud chinking exposed, but was cleaning up small piles of dirt every morning, where the chinking had fallen out. So old barn wood was nailed over the logs to preserve a rustic appearance.

local news, gasoline, quick foods, video rentals, fabrics, horse tack and hardware. The nearest big town, Burley, population 9,000, is about 50 miles away.

On a typical afternoon, local resident Thern Ward pulled in and walked behind the counter to get a key for the gas pumps.

"We operate a little differently than most stores. We're like a big family in this community," Phyllis said, smiling. A cardboard box beside the cash register holds running "tabs" for about 50 families in the valley who have credit at the store.

After he filled his tank, Ward returned to pick up some potatoes and onions for soup that night.

Meanwhile, another local resident came in to pick up mail from Postmaster Doris Edwards, who also happens to be Phyllis' sister-in-law. The post office is located along one side of the store.

During summer, the store is open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., and in winter, from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. and is closed Sunday. A neighbor, Pauline Ericksen, helps Phyllis run the store so she can have an occasional day off.

Phyllis isn't finished with the store. She plans to fill the antique wooden showcases with still more historic items from her grandmother and the Tracy family—a shiny silver coffee mill, a soda fountain beverage container—and will place a restored railroad cart out front, with flowers planted in it. She plans to write a pamphlet telling the history of the store.

"I never in my wildest dreams thought I'd one day run the Tracy Store," she said proudly. "I want to make it into a living museum." ■