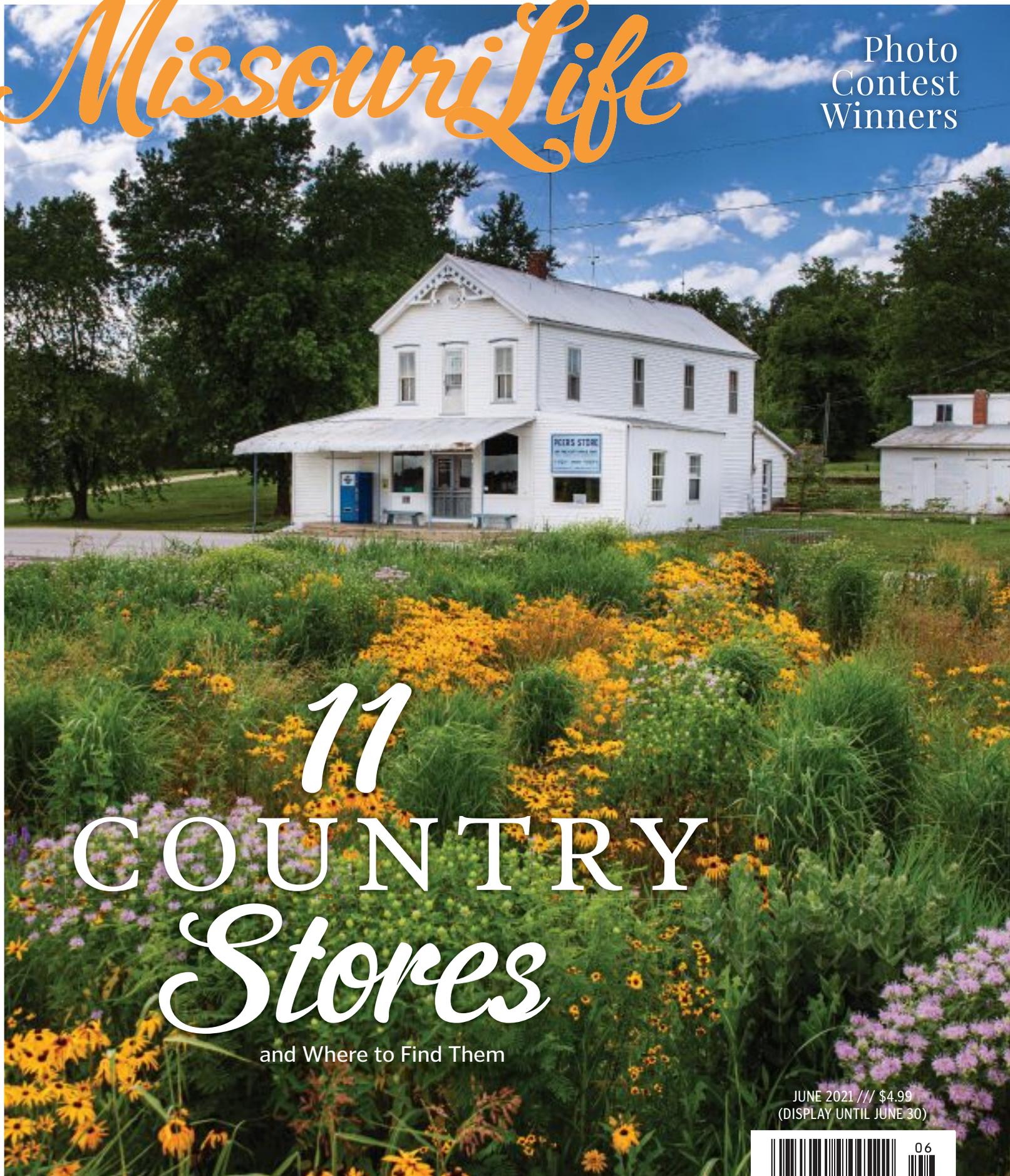


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11 COUNTRY Stores

and Where to Find Them

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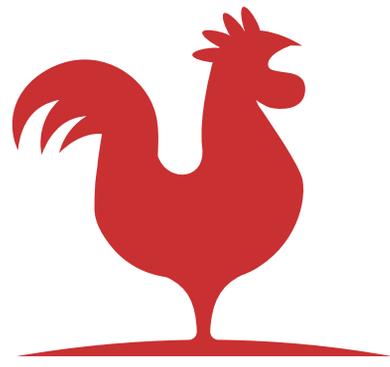
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COUNTRY STORES

—STILL GATHERING PLACES—

STORY LISA WATERMAN GRAY
PHOTOS HOLLY KITE

An old-time country store providing food, tools, and other farm supplies to a rural community was part of its heart, along with a school and a church. Many have disappeared, but there are stores today still serving as country gathering places, still capturing a bit of the nostalgia of those original ones. Here are a few to visit, where you will still find a smiling face and a cheerful welcome.





Becky Glaze



Few country stores anywhere can boast of the inventory available here. Just off Old Highway 50, in eastern Lee's Summit, Cockrell Mercantile Company fills a late 1880s general store building amid a small village of shops that operate together in this country setting.

"We have every kitchen gadget and gourmet food that you would need to make a meal at home, for novices to gourmet cooks," co-owner Becky Glaze says. "I'll bet I carry three hundred different vendors, and the biggest one would be the Fiesta ware."

Becky and her husband, Chris, initiated a complete change of lifestyle, when they purchased the business from its original owner nearly sixteen years ago. They left behind corporate loan and agricultural management and research careers. Today, Chris is operations handyman and jack of all trades. Becky gregariously greets customers as she runs daily operations while indulging her creativity.

Cockrell Mercantile Company is a place where employees typically offer free tea or coffee to customers. Food samples were everywhere before the pandemic and, perhaps, will be again soon. An 1898 cash register, an antique counter, and original wood flooring create a warm ambience. "I love the idea of still doing things the old-fashioned way, from handwritten tickets to counting back change," Becky says.

Inside the general store, floor-to-ceiling shelves display Wüsthof knives and beeswax wrap to silicone-tipped tongs and pasta makers. More than a hundred flavors of gourmet teas line shelves near a selection of teapots. Find regionally made barbecue rubs and seasonings, pancake mixes, real maple syrup, and your favorite pickled food or cocktail fixings. Then stock your kitchen with baking ingredients and extracts plus cookie cutters or candy molds.

"The store has the most useful, unique, and diverse housewares and gifts that you could ever imagine; all in one beautiful location," says Sandy Baker, who has shopped at Cockrell Mercantile for more than fifteen years. "I've brought many guests, family, and friends there, and the hospitality makes everyone eager to come back. It's a fabulous experience."

Cockrell Mercantile Company stocks five skillet sizes and three to four Dutch oven sizes of iconic Lodge cast-iron cookware as well as grill pans. There's also brand name enameled cast iron, stainless steel, and cast aluminum cookware on hand.

Fiesta Cottage at the store houses one of the Midwest's largest collections of Fiesta ware items, from casserole dishes to flower vases, while wrought iron decor and unpainted clay pots fill the open-air Cockrell Annex. Another small building next to the main one offers clothing, accessories, and home decor items. Cockrell Mercantile Company often hosts special shopping events.

More frequent cooking at home during the pandemic has had a silver lining for this business. "People have spent more money on canning supplies, napkins, place mats, and better-quality cookware," Becky says.



About an hour away from Cockrell, you can visit another store.

When Jim and Daphne Bowman purchased the 1907 building on Broadway in downtown Excelsior Springs, it was a mess. Transforming the property into usable retail space required extensive roof work and structural work that included new beams. Jim removed interior walls to open the space. He restored the original ceiling height, and he also built a staircase that led to the basement. In 2005, Willow Spring Mercantile opened as an antiques and vintage store, but not for long.

“In 2008 when the market crashed, we knew we had to bring in consumable products,” Jim says. “We brought in the gourmet packaged foods and Missouri wines to create daily traffic.”

Today, Missouri wine fans recognize brands such as TerraVox (Weston), Stone Hill Winery (Hermann), Grindstone Valley Winery (Osborn), Augusta Winery (Augusta), Amigoni Urban Winery (Kansas City), and Les Bourgeois Vineyards (Rocheport). Popular with both Excelsior Springs locals and visitors, the store now bills itself as having “the largest selection of Missouri wines, craft beers, and spirits in the state.”

Spirits lovers can purchase gin or other spirits from Of the Earth Farm + Distillery (Richmond), DogMaster Distillery (Columbia), Pinckney Bend Distillery (New Haven), and J. Rieger & Company Distillery (Kansas City), among others.

Gourmet food selections range from cheese balls or chicken salad mixes to handcrafted Belle Toffee and local honey. There is also a smattering of kitchen items plus sterling jewelry and custom artwork.

The Bowmans have also created a restaurant, the Basement Bistro. Willow Spring Mercantile routinely participates in public events that take place throughout downtown Excelsior Springs, and it has its own event once a month at the bistro.

“We offer a four-course wine dinner paired with Missouri wines,” Jim says. “We have the winery owner come in to talk about their wines, which creates an upscale event.” Owners from Noboleis Vineyards (Augusta) and Baltimore Bend Winery (Waverly) have been featured.

Daphne and Jim focus on in-season, fresh, and local ingredients, whenever possible, for the bistro. But the restaurant menu also showcases some items that customers can purchase in the retail space. “The hot bacon cheddar dip is our most popular appetizer,” Daphne says. “Our Hemme Brothers Artisanal Cheeses are used on our fruit and cheese tray, which also includes our jalapeno jam from Pappy’s Gourmet.”

“We’ve been going there pretty much since they opened,” says Mark Spohn, co-owner of the local Payne Jailhouse Bed and Breakfast. “We go to the bistro every Sunday after church. You feel special from the time you walk into Willow Spring Mercantile to the time you leave.”



Jim & Daphne Bowman





The screen door is usually open on weekend afternoons at the Peers Store, which became a Marthasville fixture after it opened in 1896, in anticipation of the Katy Railroad's arrival. Positioned only 150 feet from today's Katy Trail, the Peers Store operated continuously until 2012, primarily by one family. Despite repeated flooding from the Missouri River, the building remains in good condition.

The Peers Store functions as a welcome center for the Katy Trail and features historical photographs and displays inside. It still sells supplies, but mainly to cyclists, who appreciate finding inner tubes for their tires, as well as snacks, water, ice cream, and chips. Onesies for toddlers are emblazoned with "Future Katy Trail Rider."

Bluegrass bands on the front porch fill the store with music every Saturday and Sunday afternoon, weather permitting. During these weekend jam sessions, musicians gather to play fiddle, mandolin, and banjo together, while bonding over tunes that have been passed down, generation to generation, for more than a century.

"There might be a dozen people here at a time, wearing masks," building co-owner Dan Burkhardt says. "They hang out for a half hour or so and then they get back out on the trail." That makes Peers Store a good destination for musicians, young and old, no matter their instrument.

An antique retail shop, the Treloar Mercantile, lies about three-and-a-half miles west of Peers Store. Open for special occasions and events, the building seems frozen in time, especially with its lack of indoor plumbing.

Dan and his wife, Connie, purchased the Peers Store and Treloar Mercantile to help preserve them. The not-for-profit Magnificent Missouri, which they started, christened this area Missouri's Country Store Corridor and uses the Peers Store as its headquarters for conservation efforts along the Katy Trail.

"It's a real piece of local and Missouri history in terms of development of the area," Dan says. "There is a four-acre prairie at Peers, too, which is beautiful when it's in bloom, and the Peers Store was put on the National Register of Historic Places in 2018. There's never going to be another building like either of these two."





The family-owned Amish Country Store in Branson is the ultimate destination for a huge array of handcrafted foods that range from salsa and pickles to cake and biscuit mixes. With close to 6,500 items in stock, customers of all ages include avid cooks to fans of quality, small-batch foods. Amish and Mennonite communities from Oklahoma to Pennsylvania create about 70 percent of the goods housed in the 6,000-square-foot main building.

Amish Country Store carries products that most stores do not offer, including muscadine jam and pumpkin butter that tastes like pumpkin pie in a jar. One Mennonite family has become famous for their nut cakes, too (similar to fruit cake but without the fruit).

“We have spices that are a lot fresher and stronger than what you would find in a big-box store, too, and they’re often cheaper,” manager Matthew Hayes says.

“My parents, Terry and Darlene Whalen, started the store twenty-one years ago,” he says. Terry is his stepfather of thirty years, hence the name difference. “All of these Amish families that we work with have become friends. It’s not just about the business—it’s about the relationships that you build.

“These communities have higher growing standards too, with no crop spraying and no GMOs. It’s about small production and homemade quality,” he adds. Matthew often hear comments such as, “This reminds me of when my grandmother made it.”

Bulk baking items include fruit fillings and spices. The store also stocks flower, herbs, and vegetable seeds, plus cutlery and bakeware. Feeling adventurous? Try some Apple Butter BBQ Sauce or Apricot Syrup. Snack foods range from jerky to popcorn and toppings.

You can also shop for classic hard candy, gummies, and chocolate rocks. Dozens of jam and jelly varieties and fresh butter also draw customers. To make shopping easier, the store groups similar items together. Cheeses and homemade noodles are among the biggest sellers.

Amish Country Store also stocks Lucky Bee Honey, which comes from Matthew’s own honey operation in nearby Seymour. “Since day one customers have wanted 100 percent local honey,” he says. “We place bees on many different farms, and we go from maintaining hives to harvesting to bottling honey.”

The Whalen family is always on the lookout for more products to add to their store shelves. Originally from Louisiana, they recently added a Cajun foods section to their mix.





MORE COUNTRY STORES

Here are several more fascinating country stores well worth a visit:

COUNTRY VIEW STORE

22140 Highway 15, Memphis

660-883-5388 • CountryViewStore.com

Four miles south of Memphis, Missouri, this unique store offers kitchenware, Dutch poly furniture, a greenhouse, handmade gifts, and more.

CRANE'S COUNTRY STORE

10675 Old US Highway 40, Williamsburg

573-254-3311 • Cranes-Country-Store.com

Since 1926, this general store has offered "boots, bullets, britches, and bologna," as its slogan says. Grab a sandwich, buy farm supplies, and find old-fashioned grooming items.

DUTCH BAKERY & BULK FOOD STORE

709 Highway 50 W, Tipton

660-433-2865 • [Facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com/DutchBakeryandBulkFoodStore)

[/DutchBakeryandBulkFoodStore](https://www.facebook.com/DutchBakeryandBulkFoodStore)

Known for its bakery, bulk foods, and deli meat and cheeses, the store also sells plants, fresh produce, kitchen gifts, hanging baskets, and wooden planters and trellises, as well as wood and poly porch furniture.



DUTCH COUNTRY GENERAL STORE

305 N. Main St., Hannibal • 573-719-3372

DutchCountryGeneralStore.com

This Iowa company opened a second location in Hannibal in a downtown building erected in the mid- to late 1800s. Get hot coffee, a sandwich, or free ice cream and a nostalgic country store experience, which includes 288 bins of candy near the front door.

JAMES COUNTRY MERCANTILE

111 N. Main St., Liberty

816-781-9473 • JamesCountry.com

This store opened twenty-five years ago with a large array of historically accurate military and civilian clothing. It sells patterns and offers custom-sewing service and fabrics. It also carries Border War and other books.

OLD VILLAGE MERCANTILE

219 S. Highway 21, Caledonia

573-779-3907 • OldVillageMercantile.com

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, this store offers fudge, homemade ice cream, antiques, gifts, and more than six hundred kinds of old-fashioned candy.

THE COUNTRY STORE

1177 N. Highway 13, Chilhowee

660-885-8905

This store carries guns and ammo, and you can find antiques and work or hunting clothing, including Carhartt.