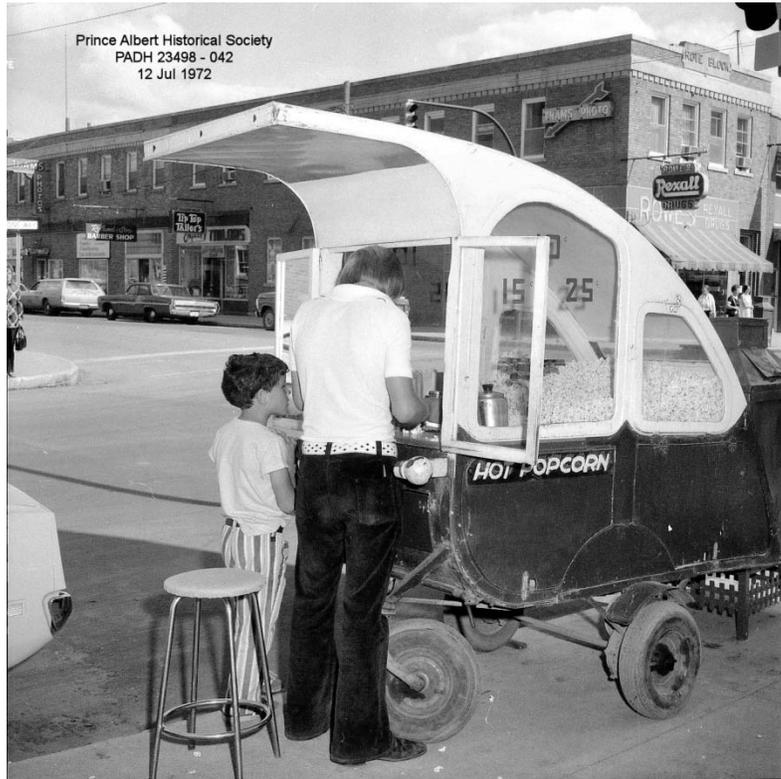


Museum Musings: Prince Albert's Pop Corn Stands

Trying to keep historical information straight and to ensure that the facts regarding artefacts are correct can be tricky. For several years, I have been confused about the pop corn stand which the Historical Society has in storage. It is, I have been assured, a pop corn stand which operated for many years on the streets of Prince Albert. In fact, I have been assured that it was the stand which stood on "the Kresge's corner" at Central Avenue and 13th Street West, and which had provided its owner with the wherewithal to send his children to university.

Yet the shape of the stand which we own is not in any way consistent with the image of the pop corn stand which I remember sitting outside of Kresge's. For me, this has been a mystery I felt an urge to resolve.



Within the Bill Smiley Archives, I was able to locate a relatively thin file labelled "Pop Corn Machine". It includes a newspaper article and photograph from an August, 1992, Prince Albert Daily Herald, some typed documents, a hand written document, and some photocopies of photographs.

After perusing these documents, and doing some further research in reference material such as the Henderson Directories, I think that I may be getting closer to a definitive answer. I am also hoping that someone who reads this article might be able to provide additional clarification.

The pictures in the archive's file show two distinct pop corn stands. One is definitely the stand which belongs to the Society. The other is the pop corn stand which I recall patronising as a youth.

One of the typed articles tells the story, somewhat inaccurately, of the stand which we own. It was apparently originally owned by a man by the name of George Spanos, the manager of the Pop Inn, which stood for many years at the southern foot of the railway bridge.

When the Historical Society came into possession of this stand is unknown, but in 1992 it was being stored in the Nisbet Church in Kinsmen Park. It was in a state of disrepair. The wheels and spokes were broken, the glass panels were cracked and broken, and its doors and drawers were missing. Also missing was the equipment required to pop the corn.

Staff and inmates at the Prince Albert Correctional Centre indicated an interest in attempting to restore the stand and were successful in completing the necessary repairs, including making new wheels to fit on the original rims. Propane equipment was purchased and installed, as was a corn popper. Everything was operational once again. The stand has since been used at several special functions.

But this is not the pop corn stand which I recall. Thanks to research completed by Society member Robert du Laux, as well as documentation provided by Denis Paulhus, I have been able to determine what I think is an accurate history of the pop corn stand which I so vividly remember.

Beginning in the late 1920s, a Greek immigrant by the name of Chris Sotos owned and operated a pop corn stand on or near Central Avenue. Sotos had a wife and two children and lived originally at 544 - 16th Street West, and later at 388 - 18th Street West. He was variously described in the Henderson Directories as a waiter, a labourer, a peanut vendor, and a pop corn vender. In 1946, he was also described as the proprietor of the Commercial Lunch, located at 820 Central Avenue.

Sotos began selling pop corn at the corner of 11th Street and Central Avenue (City Hall Park), using a propane tank for popping the corn, and a little Bunsen burner to melt the butter. According to Robert du Laux, most of the corn was popped at home, but he would add a small amount of freshly popped corn from time to time. The aroma of the freshly popped corn would draw customers to his stand. People today still remember how butter and salt would be added when the paper bag in which it was sold was half full, and then again when the corn reached the top of the bag.

Every day, beginning in early spring and ending in late autumn, Sotos would walk his stand from his home to his place of operation. In later years, he changed his location from 11th Street to the corner of Central Avenue and 13th Street. Most days, he operated from 1:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m. As his two sons grew older, they would sometimes help by taking shifts at the stand. It is believed that sufficient funds were raised to allow these two boys to attend the University of Saskatchewan, where each of them obtained a law degree. This might not seem so unbelievable when you consider that Sotos used to buy his raw kernels by the rail car!

Sotos sold his stand and business in the autumn of 1966 to Denis Paulhus, who began selling pop corn from the Kresge's location in the spring of 1967. He continued the tradition until selling out to a third operator in 1988. Unfortunately, we have no information about this person; nor how long he operated the stand.

I think that I may have resolved the mystery of Prince Albert's pop corn stands, but should anyone have further information about either of the two stands, their operators, or when the final sale occurred, I would be delighted to hear about it.

Although we have been mandated to close the Museums and postpone our garage sale and the Night at the Museum due to the Covid-19 pandemic, you can still visit our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/PrinceAlbertHistoricalSociety/> and our website at historypa.com.

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Prince Albert Historical Society
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