

# DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Conducted by Paul C. Olsen.\*

## THE "BUY-AT-HOME" ARGUMENT.

Bellevue was gay with bright-colored decorations. With streamers and banners across the main street, freshly decorated windows and every merchant and his staffs wearing huge beribboned badges—the world was told in no uncertain terms that Friday, July 22nd, was Dollar Day in Bellevue.

What a day it was. Tom Whitney, leading Bellevue druggist, will testify to that. Here in his own words is what he has to say.

"Well, sir, Dollar Day certainly went over big in Bellevue. After all the work I did getting up new window displays, writing show cards, hanging up crepe paper and arranging stock, I began to be just a little bit nervous about how this Dollar Day the Chamber of Commerce had persuaded us to work together on would pull.

"The idea was that we were to arrange as much of our stock as we could in special assortments to sell at a dollar each. No cut prices, you know. Just a package of this and two bottles of that all grouped together and sold that way for a dollar.

"That was plenty of work, I'll tell you, getting ready those dollar specials along with all the extra decorating and fixing up. But we merchants simply had to do something. With almost everybody owning an automobile and the new paved road open a year now to Spokane, I tell you we small town merchants were feeling it and feeling it hard. All up and down the valley it seemed as if our country customers were whizzing right by us and going on to Spokane. Sixty miles on a concrete road is nothing these days.

"Finally the Chamber of Commerce hit on this Dollar Day plan. Each merchant was to offer as much of his stock as he could in units to sell for a dollar each. To make the whole thing seem like a real holiday we hired a couple of brass bands, got the interurbans and bus companies to decorate their cars and generally made things look like an old-time Fourth of July celebration.

"And the way the people did come! My store was jammed from half past seven in the morning until long after midnight and if I hadn't sold practically everything in the store and from my reserve stock in the cellar I'd have been doing business all night.

"Why, there were people in the store I hadn't seen for at least five years. It was four years ago this past spring that I put in these new show windows and lowered the entrance to the street level. If there were two persons who commented on those improvements, there were two hundred. That just goes to show how business has been drifting away from Bellevue these past few years.

"Everything would have been fine if things had kept up after that big starting rush. That's the sad part. We thought we could win back some of the trade

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that had been getting away from us and we did—but just for that one time. Since then it's been the same old story—no business at all through the week and Saturdays just about half what they used to be and ought to be. Bellevue is growing and the country around here is growing even faster, but we merchants are standing still or going backward. That is, all of us except Jim Gordon, the hardware man. Winter or summer, good times or poor, he seems to go right on doing business. Would you believe it, he's enlarged his store three times in the five years he's been here?

"I've talked myself blue in the face with these mossbacks here trying to get them to buy at home and keep the money in circulation here instead of using it to make those Spokane merchants rich or, worst of all, help those big mail order houses back in Chicago.

"They all agree with me—in theory—but let some 'smart aleck' in San Francisco or Seattle or any place out of town send them an offer of a traveling bag for \$19.95 and they fall for it, although if they only took the trouble to look around in Bill Bevan's trunk store they'd find him selling better bags right along for \$15 and \$18.75."

To an impartial observer the leading merchants of Bellevue grouped along Main Street between Elm and Bradford Streets did not present a very impressive appearance in their ordinary dress. True, on the long remembered Dollar Day the special windows and extra decorations—not to mention the attractive arrangements of goods inside the store and the smiling salespeople anxious to serve—gave Main Street in Bellevue an appearance which to this day has never been excelled in towns many times its size.

But to the venturesome visitor who might return later to Bellevue with his mind full of these pleasant recollections, there was indeed a rude awakening. It was just as if a youth were to see his dreamy-eyed dance partner—a vision the night before in shimmering black silk—the next morning in a bedraggled wrapper, boudoir cap and down-at-the-heel slippers.

Bill Bevan's trunk store of which Tom Whitney, the druggist, spoke so convincingly was a sight. As an antique shop or second-hand furniture store it might have succeeded but as a supposedly up-to-date trunk and baggage shop it was a flat failure. On a summer's day Bill lounged comfortably on the sidewalk in front of his place of business, his chair tilted back on its two hind legs. Bill's dress never would win him any laurels. At the neckband of his collarless shirt gleamed a shining gold-plated collar button. He wore slippers which had been his daily companions since high-school days many years before. Bill believed in solid comfort in the summer time.

The prospective customer who had the temerity to interrupt Bill's frequent naps or assiduous newspaper reading would have found Bill following him (several steps in the rear) into the dark and forbidding interior of his store. Economical Bill would turn on a light or two and there in heterogeneous array from floor to ceiling was revealed in its dusty and dusky grandeur the stock of Bellevue's leading leather goods merchant. Perhaps you wonder where are those \$15 and \$18.75 bags of which Tom Whitney spoke so enthusiastically. I doubt if Bill himself could tell you in spite of all his apparent leisure for naps and newspaper reading. A few minutes' search by Bill (undertaken not any too graciously) might

bring one to light from beneath the cavernous counter. True, this one was so covered with dust that even Bill himself—expert leather goods man—couldn't be sure of its original color until he had carried it to the feeble daylight near the door. Unfortunately, this trip to the daylight revealed also that the really handsome brass fittings had been tarnished to an uninviting greenish black. Quite a contrast to the alluring descriptions and captivating color photographs in the folder of the San Francisco mail order house which sold a traveling bag somewhat similar for three dollars more. The wonder is that Bill did any business at all in the face of this competition!

Bill Bevans was not alone in his weaknesses and shortcomings. All up and down Main Street in a summer afternoon could be seen other collarless merchants tilted perilously back on rickety chairs in front of their stores.

The one exception was Jim Gordon, whose hardware store was the pride of Bellevue and the envy of his fellow merchants. Jim was far too busy to have any time to loaf on the sidewalk; in fact he and his five assistants had all they could do to keep up with the demands of his growing business. More important, Jim Gordon knew his show windows were one of the most important means of advertising that he had and he would not think of blocking their fullest use by imposing his rather impressive bulk on a chair in front of one of them. Then, too, he thought that a proprietor loafing in front of his store was not a very good advertisement of the prosperity of the business.

It would be a long story to explain here all the methods and ideas which Jim Gordon put into effect to make his store in five busy years the largest and best liked of any store of its kind in the whole valley. He tried painstakingly always to give his customers the kinds of merchandise and service that they wanted and had a right to expect. He advertised in his windows, in the local and surrounding newspapers and directly by mail. In brief, Jim Gordon conducted the best hardware store he knew how and used advertising persistently so as to spread this news faster than it could possibly travel by word of mouth.

Jim's methods were neither unusual nor sensational. Any other merchant in Bellevue could have used them with probably equal success, had he been willing to devote the necessary time and energy. But they didn't and that was what made the difference between their stores and his.

Jim always felt mildly amused when discouraged fellow merchants came to him with plans for buy-at-home campaigns and asked his assistance, financial and otherwise. Invariably he cooperated enthusiastically, because he realized he would be even more prosperous if only there were other attractions in Bellevue in addition to his own store. Six or eight good stores close together will draw even more than six or eight times as many people as a single good store located by itself.

Time and time again Jim Gordon had exhorted his fellow merchants, both singly and in groups, that the way to a success similar to his own was not by frenzied appeals to people's sympathies.

"Buy at home and help the poor merchant live."

"When you say that," he said, "you put yourself in a class with a beggar. You admit that you have no real right to exist, except by the charity of others. You can't expect and you should not want any business on that basis."

"Look here, Frank," he said to a leading grocer, "you know you buy right

along in Spokane item after item that you might be getting right here in town from the Bellevue Wholesale Grocery Company. Why do you do it? Their prices are about the same and you don't have to pay any trucking charges if you buy here in town."

"But this local crowd never have what you want and sometimes they let me wait two or three days before they tell me about it. Nine times out of ten I can get quicker and better service from Spokane, in spite of the distance."

"There you are. You yourself are doing the very thing that you object so much to your customers doing with you. The Bellevue Wholesale Grocery Company wouldn't get very far with a sympathy argument with you and you can't expect such an arguement to get very far with your customers either. You've got to have the right merchandise, fair prices and good service to attract and hold customers these days."

Jim's insistence finally changed the plans for the proposed "Buy at Home Day" to a "Dollar Day" and by persistent effort he succeeded in getting his fellow merchants at least for that once to dress and conduct their stores in a manner which was a credit to themselves and to Bellevue.

The result. The biggest crowds in years—new people in town, new customers, new purchases. What a golden opportunity if it only had been followed through by consistently aggressive merchandising. Jim Gordon did; his business and his profits told the story. But the other merchants were soon back to the sluggish, despondent level from which Jim's inspiration had lifted them temporarily. The price of continued success is continued intelligent effort.

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#### SEASONABLE DISPLAYS FOR JULY AND AUGUST.

Cameras and photographic supplies.	Travelers' toilet articles.
Film developing, printing and enlarging.	Bath supplies.
First aid kits.	Week-end candy and tobacco supplies.
Mosquito, ivy poison and sunburn remedies.	Telephone and mail order service.
Insecticides.	Stationery and school supplies.
Fountain pens and mechanical pencils.	

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#### DIVISION BIOLOGY AND AGRICULTURE NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL.

At the annual meeting of the Division of Biology and Agriculture of the National Research Council held at Washington, D. C., in May, Dr. Heber W. Youngken was reelected Chairman of its Committee on Pharmaceutical Botany and Pharmacognosy and the following members of the committee were also reelected: H. H. Rusby, W. W. Stockberger, E. N. Gathercoal and E. L. Newcomb. This committee is at present conducting an extensive investigation on the available commercial geographical sources of domestic medicinal plants. The census being conducted from the office of Dr. Stockberger in the Bureau of Plant Industry at Washington. Pharmacists, botanists, state officials and others interested in plants are requested to communicate in-

formation on the exact location of areas in which American medicinal plants are to be found in commercial quantities to Dr. W. W. Stockberger, Bureau of Plant Industry, Washington, D. C.

#### PLANT SCIENCE SEMINAR.

The Fifth Annual Plant Science Seminar in Pharmacognosy, Plant Chemistry and Botany will be held August 16-19 at the Missouri Botanical Gardens, St. Louis. Prof. E. N. Gathercoal, Chicago, is the President, and Dr. O. P. M. Canio, Ozone Park, New York, is the Secretary.

John H. Kellog, to whom every Missouri plant is known, will be one of the leaders for the field trip to be taken by the Plant Science Seminar on Friday, August 19, at Gray's Summit, the fifteen acre addition to the gardens.