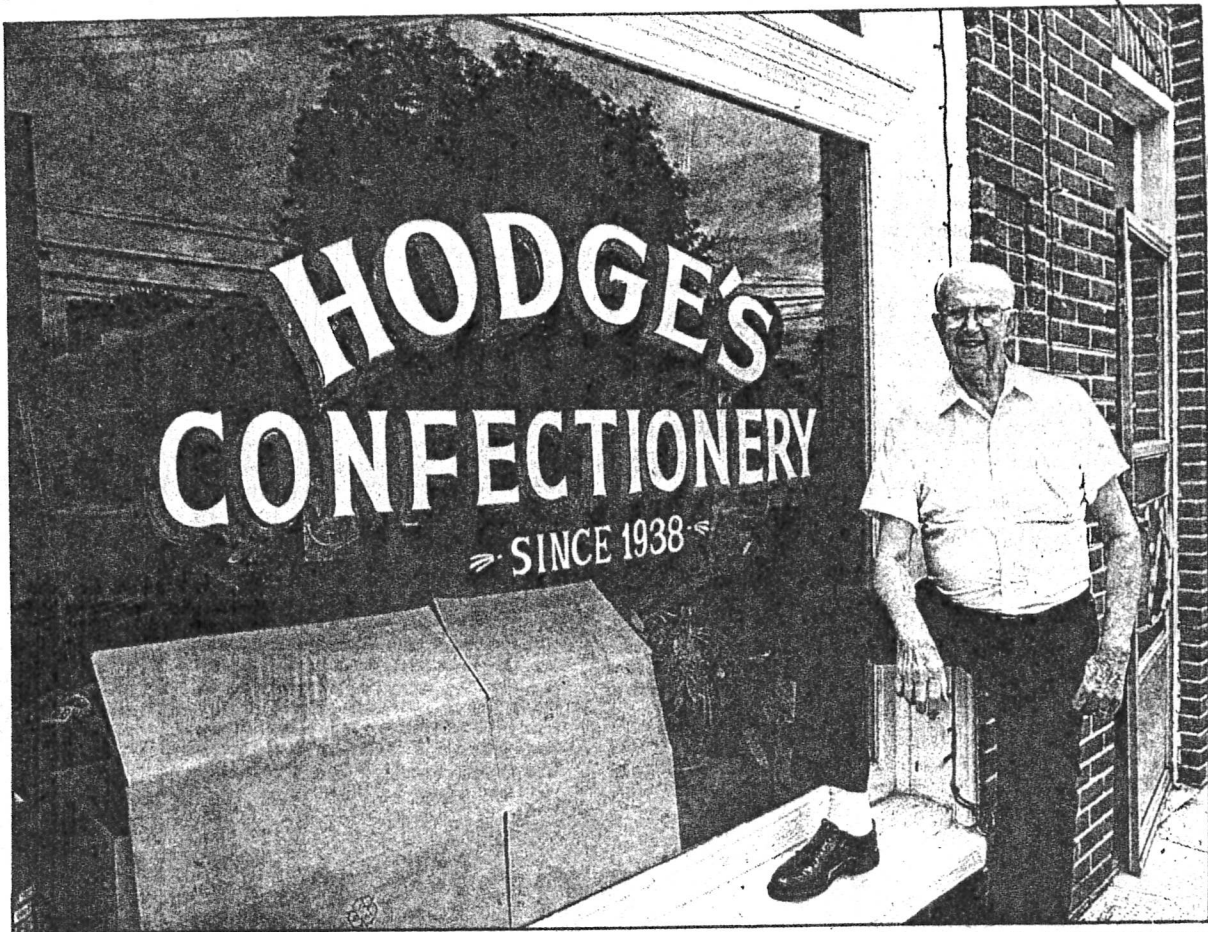


file = HODGE

EA

From Page

by 'Bar  
Bluff C'  
(first) n  
H  
busine  
of ice  
barro  
1920s  
whic



Herald Courier/Bill McKee

Erskine Hodge stands in front of the restaurant he has operated at the same spot — Main Street in Bluff City — for the past 53 years.

## Bluff City eatery a slice of life

TRACY M. HAMM  
Staff Writer

BLUFF CITY — Erskine "Banty" Hodge can count eight restaurants within a few miles of his 53-year-old Main Street eatery, but none probably have the legacy of a time long since passed.

"It's a wonder that my business hasn't fell off quite a bit, because when you look at it, the last two or three years ... there's been eight different places that sell the same things," Hodge said.

Hodge's Confectionery celebrated its 53rd year of business June 29 at the same spot on Main Street. And it's

### Folks



### you should know

long been known as a hangout of sorts, whether it's the lunchtime regulars or a group of schoolkids.

"It's been a hangout for young people for years and years," Hodge said. "When the high school was here, they were allowed to come to town for lunch. I'd have 40 to 90 every day.

"They got out — I've told

this many times — at 20 minutes after (noon). And at 23 minutes after, you could see them through the vacant lot across the street. At 23 after, they'd come in and at 5 minutes to 1, they were all gone."

That was 20 years ago. Even today, the students still come, but the high school has since been moved several miles away.

"I still have a lot of schoolkids, especially along the last two, three or four weeks (of the school year)," he said. "Everybody knows me, and all the kids, they know me

Please see EATERY, Page 5A

# EATERY

From Page 1A

by 'Banty.' There's people in Bluff City who don't know my (first) name."

Hodge got his start in the business world hauling chunks of ice around town in a wheelbarrow. He started work in the 1920s at a local grocery store, which stored 300-pound blocks

of ice covered with sawdust.

When it came time to sell the ice, it was washed in a rain barrel and cut. Then Hodge would begin pushing his wheelbarrow to wherever the ice was needed.

"That was before water was put in Bluff City," Hodge said. "I'd deliver (ice) all over

town in a wheelbarrow."

After a short stint in a local drug store, Hodge began work in another drug store for Dr. A.E. Denton. Hodge's present career soon took off.

"He built that building down there in 1938, and moved out of here," Hodge said of Denton's move to the growth area of the city along today's state Route 390. "I stayed in here. I was working for him when he moved. Since then, I've had it."

Hodge inherited from the move the drugstore's fountain and potbelly stove. And after a few other additions, he was in business.

"I borrowed \$300" to start, Hodge said. "I bought all I could on credit and then paid for it \$5 per month."

Prices of yesteryear called for 10-cent hamburgers and 5-cent Cokes. Today, a hamburger sells for \$1.10.

Business hours now run from 6:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., a far cry from previous hours of 7:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. After all, the 79-year old entrepreneur, who will be 80 in mid-August, is also showing signs of change.

"I'm trying to sell out. I want to sell out," he said.

But he's not exactly wanting to sell out for business reasons. Business, after all, has remained brisk.

"It's held up real good. Mine has been consistent more or less," Hodge said of his 53 years in business.

"I kept up with (sales) for 6 to 8 to 10 years. When I opened up, it increased every year. I'd say the last 15 to 20 years has been my best business."