

June 19, 2010 - Wall Drug Store, Wall, SD

In 1963 my new wife and I were returning from our honeymoon "road trip" out West to the Grand Canyon, the Petrified Forrest, Las Vegas, Yellowstone and the Grand Tetons Mountains. We began seeing billboards advertising the [Wall Drugstore](#), in South Dakota while we were still in Wyoming. Those road signs began promising us great things if we would just stop...so stop we did. While it was interesting strolling through that store, with all of its tourist items, souvenirs, and trip memorabilia, I wondered just how the idea of all of that roadside advertising came about.

Well in 1931 Ted and Dorothy Hustead purchased the only drug-store in this town of 326 people in the post depression/dust bowl town of Wall, SD. Business was poor, to say the least and after 5 years with little to show for their hard work, the Husteads were almost ready to head back to Sioux Falls. 1936 was an exceptionally hot summer and the long drive across the prairie to Mt. Rushmore was especially wearing in those days of pre air conditioned automobiles. It was due to all of that heat that Dorothy had an idea. Why not offer, via road side signs, free ice water to any tourist stopping by. A series of 12x36 inch boards were placed, Burma Shave style, on Highway 16 advertising the free ice water, and, low and behold, the cars began to arrive. Today the ice water is still free, the coffee is a just nickel a cup, and the cars continue to stop...as many as 20,000 people worth per summer day. The Drug store still has a working pharmacy, but also a large restaurant, several smaller snack bars, and several dozen unique shops and boutiques offering everything from native American artifacts, pottery, western clothing and boots, books, Christmas items, etc. etc. The old saying, "if we don't have it, you don't need it" would certainly apply here.

The Wall municipal air park is a short 75 mile flight from my summer base at the Custer County airport. On a near perfect flying day in mid June, I decided to see if there had been any changes since I had last visited the Wall Drug store some 47 years previously. Upon landing at Wall municipal field, I wandered over to one of the open hangers and spoke to the gentlemen who was working on his airplane, a Ballanca high wing. He introduced himself as David Hahn, the manager of the airport. It turns out that he is also the town's Mayor. After a nice visit, in which he gave me a small mini flashlight advertising the municipal airport, and the loan of \$20 (I had left my wallet behind in Custer) I wandered the 6 blocks over to the Drug Store.

It seems to be a lot larger than I previously remember and with a lot more "attractions" including a gold panning area for kids, a water spurting/ splashing play area (again for kids), plus literally hundreds of old photos lining the walls, many from the late 1800's. There was even a series of photos of an actual hanging, that was discretely hiding behind a carved cigar store indian statue. I wandered about for an hour or so before heading into the restaurant for a light lunch, enjoying the nickel cup of coffee and some apple pie for desert. Then it was back to the air park for my return flight to Custer. I'm glad that I made this return trip to the Wall Drug store some 47 years after my first visit. I can hardly wait for my next stopover in 2057 to see all of the new stuff that may have been added by then.



Mayor Dave Hahn & me at the Wall Airport



Downtown entrance to the Wall Drug Store



After lunch, a rest in the inner court yard



Frank and Buffalo at one of the stores