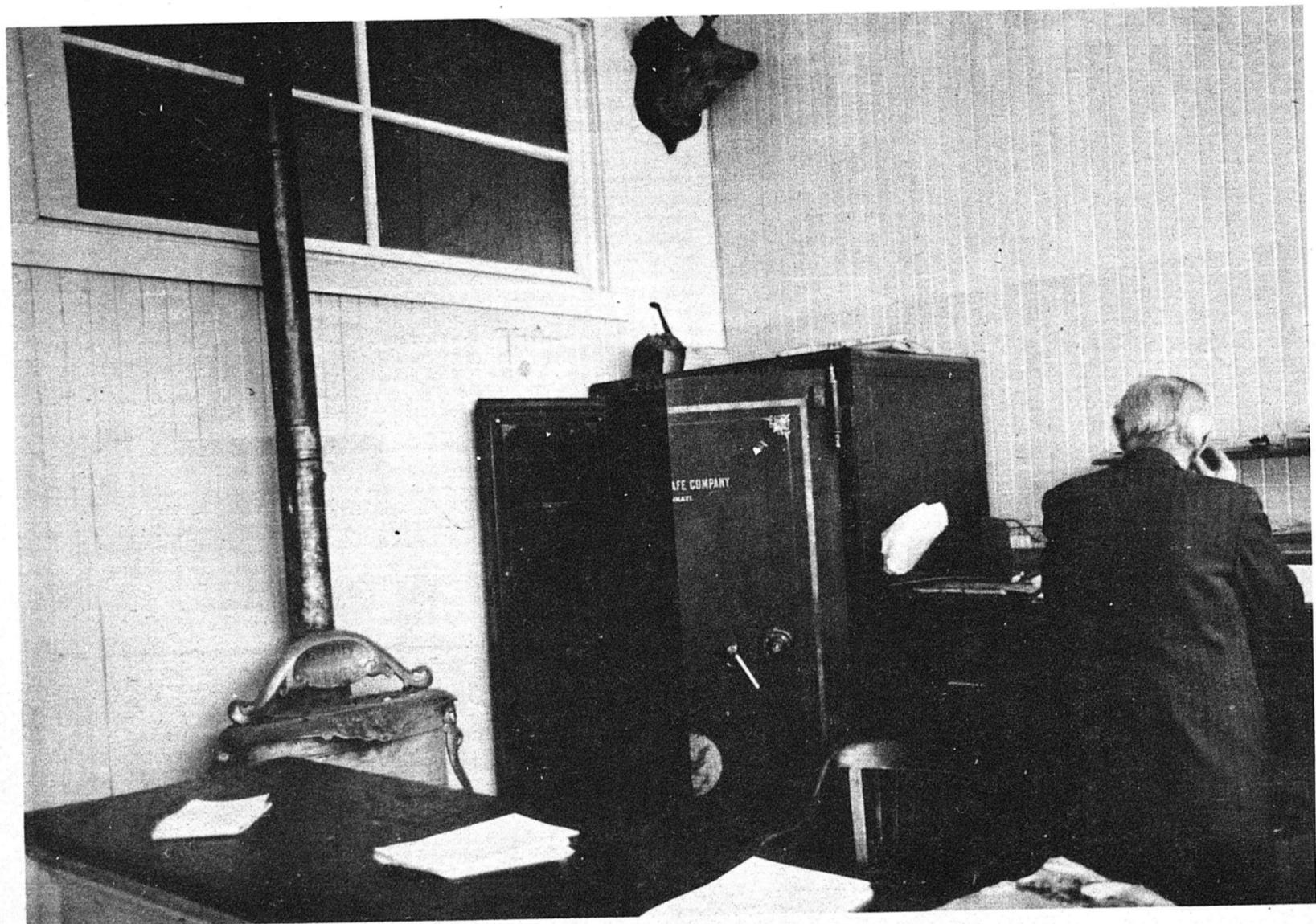




"It was better to do it that way than making a big deal about it..."



"a cash register already 25 years old when they opened the store."



"The old man wouldn't turn around as he talked to us. And he talked as little as possible. Sure, we could have a picture of the old safe..."

Photos by Linda Fair

by Terri Jackson

The old man wouldn't turn around as he talked to us. And he talked as little as possible. Sure, we could have a picture of the old safe. No he didn't think he wanted to talk to anyone about the history of the business... too late now.

The clerks, first curious, then adopting the guardedness of the old man, quietly disappeared into the back of the shop. The old man was still bent over the long, columned ledger books as we left the shop.

The owner of the American Barbershop wouldn't leave the small back room. "Come back another day," he called out through the doorway, "You come back some other time."

But there are few "other times" for many of the merchants on a section of 101 street just north of the main downtown area. Since August they have lived under the shadow of a June deadline to close their shops or move elsewhere.

It's hard to describe the feeling in the area which once held the promise of becoming Edmonton's Gastown—the little row of long-established second-hand stores and the newer "head shops" which have more recently moved into the area. The feeling is hostility and suspicion, born of a helplessness and despair. But to give it those names is to intellectualize something which somehow demands the dignity of being left just a feeling.

Almost symptomatic of that despair is the fact that no one is sure who bought the land on which their shops have stood since the turn of the century, and no one is sure what the land will be used for. Some say the city bought it for possible widening of 103 Avenue which defines the area on the south; others that the site will be used for a proposed City Hall annex; still others that it was bought by the YMCA to be used as a parking lot.

Whatever its fate, the site will no longer be the address of Slutker's Fur & Hide, Rodd's Western Wear, Mark's Exchange, or the newer Cordwainer leather shop and the Punjab Emporium.

With some legal advice, the tenants succeeded in getting the original closing date extended until June, explained Duncan, one of the co-proprietors of the Cordwainer.

The reprieve was granted partly on the grounds that trappers who for years had brought their raw furs to Slutker's every spring could not be contacted about the move and would not know where to take their furs when they came into Edmonton.

Asked why they didn't press to have the decision reconsidered altogether, Duncan, an anthropology student at the U of A, said "it was better to do it that way than making a big deal about it," and more cynically: "What's a demonstration in Edmonton, anyway? Fifty people and three placards..."

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