

# Who Remembers...Top Seven (Almost) Forgotten Services?

Here is another installment in our *Who Remembers?* series. You can browse previous articles by using the search bar on the right or by clicking [here](#). These articles are strolls down memory lane. In some cases the buildings are still there, but new businesses have replaced them. In other instances, the buildings or even the properties have been razed. Instead of a building, it may be a TV show, personality, or commercial that no one longer exists. Either way, it can't stop us from taking the Memory Lane stroll!



*There are very few places where one can get their shoes shined! (returntomanliness.com)*

As always we would rather this be a discussion. No one knows this area better than those who grew up here! Please, leave constructive criticism, feedback, and corrections. We'd love to hear your anecdotes. Please share!

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How fun it is to wax nostalgic about things gone past. To pore over images that evoke vivid memories and often powerful emotions. I've often not thought even passively about something, yet the mere mention of it or a glimpse of a photo brings back a flood of memories – taking me right back to the very timeline when they were commonplace. It's as close to time traveling as we have, isn't it?

I have so many things I would positively love to share, but sadly we lack the images. Scores of articles would have passed if I had pictures to accompany them. Alas, recalling days of old is much harder to do without images to serve as a mnemonic device – there isn't a more powerful and effective method of recall. Hint, hint! If you have pictures of greater New Bedford's past, please consider sharing them with us, so we can offer many more of these strolls down memory lane.

In the past – pardon the pun – we have discussed landmarks, images and occupations that have been (almost) forgotten. This time around I'd like to share some services that have been almost forgotten. Of course, being 44 years old, there are services that have I never even heard of, or simply weren't a part of growing up. That doesn't mean you can't share yours. By all means, do so!

## **Milk Delivery**

Before chocolate milk, strawberry milk, and banana milk, there was...milk! Extracted from a 4 legged beast called cow, this strange liquid would be bottled in glass, sealed with a tin foil cap and dropped off at your doorstep or ...gasp the milk chute, by sunrise. You simply had to open your front door or milk chute and there it was.



*No jokes, please. Ok,  
maybe one. Or five.*

Before my time, you could leave out your own bottles or containers and the milkman would charge you according to the volume.

Wanted some cream, cheese or butter? No problem. Just leave a memo. When you were done, you rinsed, then placed the empty bottles back in the crate for the next day. Easy as pie. If you were up at the hour that the milkman made deliveries, it wouldn't be uncommon to ask him to drop something off at a friend's house down the road.

The occupation is mostly remembered today for being an abundant source of infidelity jokes. I'm willing to bet there are kids today who have cracked a milkman joke or two in their time – yet don't actually know what a milkman is or did. Well, unless you share this article with them, that is.

## **Doctor's House Calls**

Here is a service that has almost come full circle. Yes, there was a time where you and your doctor had a semi-formal, in some cases, casual relationship. You could call him "Doctor" or even by his first name.



*House Calls – an idea that perhaps could should be revisited!*

In the 1960s nearly half of visits with a doctor were done right at the patient's home. There was a time when this was absolutely normal. Sadly, nowadays it sounds a bit odd. In an era, where a hospital itself can be a breeding ground for bacteria, and even a dangerous place in light of overworked, fatigued doctors, it seems that this idea could use some revisiting.

Of course, there are certain injuries or ailments that require modern technology and a large staff. However, there are some illnesses that would benefit all if the house call was brought back. In fact, it seems strange if you think about a very ill person, hopping into a car and driving themselves to a hospital where they sit in a waiting room spreading germs. Almost counter-intuitive.

A service that has almost come full circle? Perhaps, not quite. Maybe a partial circle. There has been a slight comeback in this service as some doctors are reconsidering and even practicing the concept – for reasons beyond the scope of this article.

## **Cobbling**

No, this is not the software or the culinary art of producing fruit-filled pastries. A cobbler was the fellow who would

actually handcraft shoes. Before mass production and Asian sweatshops, there was the lonely cobbler.



*Today's method of shoe "repair"? Throw them away and buy new ones!*

This man would repair your shoes, extending their longevity and it wouldn't be uncommon to have the same pair of shoes for many years. Look sharp too!

This is perhaps the REAL "world's oldest profession." From the time that mankind needed to walk about and hunt, he needed something to protect his feet to allow him to chase prey or escape predators. This makes the loss of this profession and service a loss for humanity. If you know who to ask and where to look, you can still find a cobbler.

These days, the cobbler has been made mostly irrelevant and people prefer simply casting the shoes away and buying a new pair. Another science, craft or art-form lost to time.

## **Shoe Shining**

Shoe shining or boot polishing are both still found in places like New York City, however it is a service that is an endangered species. At least in America. In many parts of the world, like India or Afghanistan, it is the sole source of income for women.

In the day of shoelaces, sneakers, and tennis shoes there is

very little need for a shoe shine. Today's fashion is primarily an informal one that seldom requires a pair of "dress-up" shoes. Even if a person owns a pair of shoes that could use a proper shoe shine, they are worn so little that, a little self-buff every 5 years does the job.



*The oldest photo in existence of a human being shows a gentleman having his shoes shined. Taken in 1853, this photo was on a busy street in Paris, but the long exposure time (10 minutes) eliminated the moving traffic.*

## **Paperboy**

When I was growing up the newspaper delivery was the realm of one person: the teenager. Chosen delivery vehicle? The trusty BMX. Every teenage boy earned spending money to fund his comic book addiction or stamp collection. It was one of the last rites of passage for boys.

These days, because of inflation, cost of living and dwindling social security, many adults have a paper delivery route to make ends meet. With the retirement age being extended, people are undertaking a paper route as a non-labor intensive way to

make extra cash.

## **Elevator Operator**

I actually experienced this last week. The first time in decades. Many people in this new generation would think “Why would I need a person to push a button for me? How lazy!” Whippersnappers!

However, that really was not the primary job of an elevator operator in spite of the occupation’s name. There was an era when elevators would not automatically stop and would require manual timing. However, they were also part-greeter, part-tour guide. Superlative founts of information and a living directory – especially useful in tall buildings and in department stores.

Nowadays we have dissected the elevator operator and require many occupations and devices to do what they did. We have separate tour guides, greeters, information desks, directory placards, and customer service booths.

There is also the seemingly preferred method of exiting an elevator and looking about with a puzzled look, before popping back in and trying again.

## **Soda Jerker**

A soda jerk would serve libation at a soda fountain at an apothecary or drugstore. Say what?



Once upon a time, the drugstore was the place to pick up your mail, some groceries and your medicine. Of course, if you were a kid, you looked forward to mom running these errands, because every drugstore had a soda fountain. One could pick amongst a number of flavors for your soda or ice cream float.

The soda jerk, was often a teenager or young man who would pull or “jerk” the lever or spigot to mix the soda (carbonation) and water which were on two separate taps – after putting in the flavored syrup of your choice. Some soda jerks attracted clientele by their showmanship or flair that they would exhibit while preparing the soda.

The last place I recall being served by a soda jerk at a soda fountain was at **Woolworth’s Five & Dime**.

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*Honorary mention should be made of the milliner or hatter, haberdasher, telephone operator, and street sweepers. What era did you grow up and what services to recall and miss?*

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