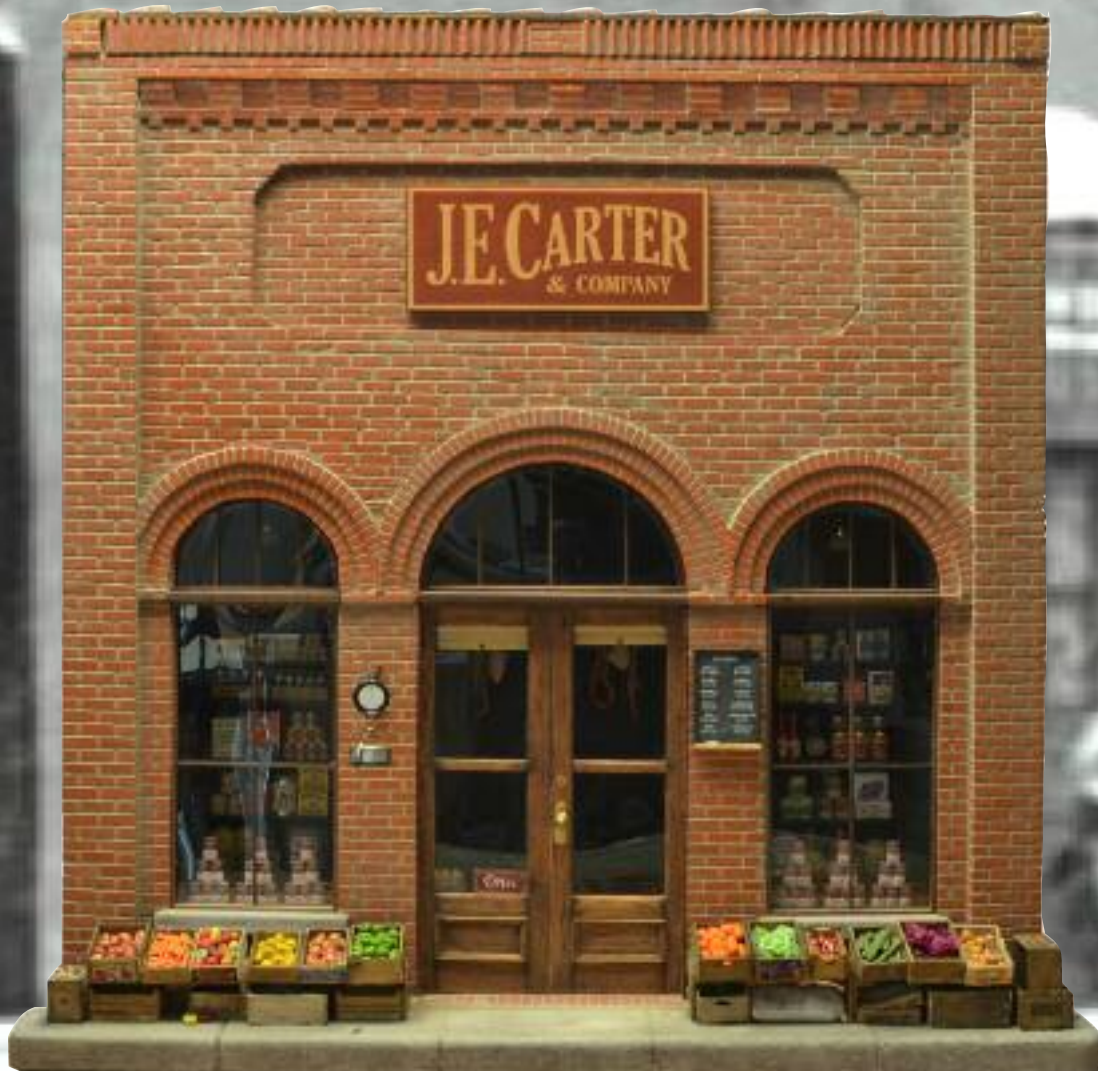


Earl Carter's Grocery Store

Circa 1924

AN ARCHITECTURAL MINIATURE BY THOMAS NORPELL



Presented to President and Mrs. Carter, July 13, 2016

BackStory

Dr. and Mrs. Morgan were returning from a family reunion in Michigan when they stopped for an overnight in Broad Ripple, Indiana, the artsy enclave of eateries northeast of downtown Indy. Upon visiting an art gallery the next day, they saw one of my barn miniatures. They liked it, but wondered if the plug-in electric cord powering the barn's yard light could be replaced with a battery-operated, cordless arrangement. I agreed to do this, but recommended making a new barn rather than tearing up the existing one. Emails

were exchanged as we communicated on the new barn's progress. Learning that their ancestors

were agricultural product manufacturers, I made signs of the type found posted on barns that advertised these products. They were very happy with the personalization of their miniature. During our email exchanges I learned that Caron Morgan is the former daughter-in-law of President Carter and mother of James Earl Carter IV. They visited us in Martinsville the following year, and the next year invited us to Atlanta.

My wife Maryann and I met with Steve and Caron Morgan, and James and Sally Carter, in their home on January 3rd of this year, and it was during lunch together that I was asked to create an architectural miniature as a gift for President Carter. Usually, when given a commission, the sponsors tell you what the subject will be; and, though they had ideas, they wanted me to propose my idea. Later, on our drive to Chattanooga, Maryann had to ask questions twice to pry me out of my daydreams.

At the hotel I logged on the Internet where I studied every building I could find associated with President

Carter. I set my bar high; I wanted to create an authentic moment in time, and I wanted it to be something the Carter family had never seen before.

I did like the modest bungalow where President Carter lived from age 4 until he went off to college. But I kept returning to the small grocery store on the farm known as the commissary because it suggested an opportunity to create a specific moment in time through the addition of key accessories. But the commissary was very narrow and very deep, a shotgun house as they're called in the South, and not an ideal configuration for a miniature.

Then I read how President Carter's father, known to everyone as "Mr. Earl," was a grocer in Plains after serving in WWI and before becoming a farmer full time. The success of the grocery store, in fact, provided the financial leverage for purchasing the farm where the peanut empire took root. And I wondered: What did the store look like? And, Where is the building today?

Back home, I searched the Internet but came up with nothing. I could always make a generic building typical of Main Street America, I thought; but, no, I wanted the real thing. Then, one day, an old photo turned up on the Internet. The sign over the door showing the name J. E. Carter was all the proof I needed. This was it! The very next day, President Carter's autobiography, *An Hour Before Daylight*, arrived, and there the building was again, on page 138. (*More, next page*)



"President Carter had many questions due to his love of history and his being an artisan, painter, and furniture maker."

Having already familiarized myself with the commercial buildings in Plains I recognized this beautiful little brick building as one of the architectural gems of Main Street. It is Romanesque in style, single-story brick construction, with arched doors and windows, and a decorative brick cornice. My brother, Butch, a professional photographer living in South Carolina, drove to Plains and thoroughly photographed every detail of the building for me. Now I could get to work.

As I began replicating the store's architecture I wondered: What stood in the windows, what sat on the sidewalks, what hung on the walls inside?

Just like historical movies blend fact with fiction, I filled-in the missing details with prudently researched accessories. Old photos of grocery stores, for example, showed that the produce departments were almost always laid out along the front sidewalk, and that's where I put ours. To showcase the everyday technology of the day I included a Victorian wall clock, a brass candlestick telephone, and a cathedral radio.

I hung food manufacturers' posters on the walls, the visual promotions distributed to grocery stores as they transitioned from clerked stores to self service. To represent the products themselves, I recreated 42 regional and national brands in miniature and set them along shelves inside the display windows.

Lastly, I wanted to include accessories of personal significance to the Carters. You'll see a period map of Georgia; a Red Cross poster of the day promoting the profession of nursing (Jimmy's mother's profession); you'll see a Magnolia Plantation poster advertising the Saturday night dance where the President's parents stepped onto the dance floor for the first time.

Prime Mover. Caron Morgan, (shown next to the Carters) and her husband, Steve, were responsible for making the Presidential Gift happen. They had wanted for some time to give the Carters a special gift, and said they saw In Tom's work an opportunity to do so.

And there's a wall calendar that fixes our moment in time as October, 1924. The calendar is from a fictionalized Ford dealership in Americus, GA, and it bears a photo of Mr. Earl's sporty Ford runabout, the car he drove on his first date with the President's mother, Lillian. Wednesday, October 1 is circled on the calendar. It's the day President Carter was born.

We presented the miniature to President and Mrs. Carter at the Carter Center and Presidential Library in Atlanta on July 13. They were transfixed, saying they had never seen anything like it. A lost moment from their distant past had suddenly returned to life. They were visibly moved.

A week after returning home I received a handwritten note from President Carter:

7/13/16

To Tom Norpell:

I am deeply grateful to you for creating the remarkable miniature of my father's store! I told Caron and Steve that I've never received a gift with so much pleasure and excitement.

Thank you!

Jimmy Carter.

PS: I hope you can visit Plains some day. JC



The Exterior

We began this project with the idea of depicting the Plains, Georgia, grocery store that Earl Carter operated during the 1920s. Nearly two weeks of research on the Internet were invested before an image of the store surfaced. It was also found later in President Carter's autobiography, *"An Hour Before Daylight."*

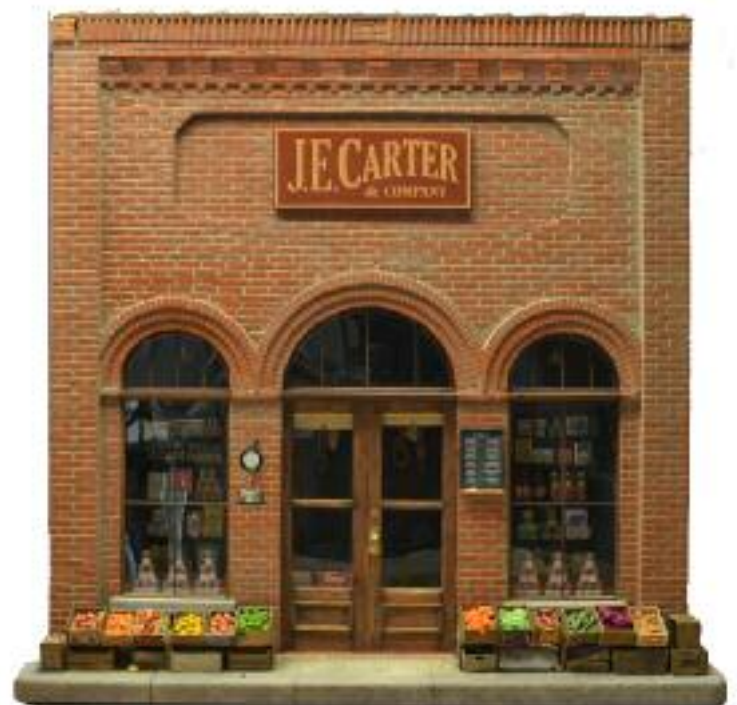
Unfortunately, the images of the surviving building found on the Internet were of marginal quality, so my brother, professional photographer and South Carolinian, Butch Norpell, did a thorough shoot of the building. With those pictures in hand, the building's construction could finally get underway.



1920's store photo



The building today



The store in miniature, circa 1924



The Brickwork

Earl's store is an example of Romanesque commercial architecture popular along Main Street shopping districts during the latter half of the 19th Century. The style featured arched windows and ornate brickwork along the cornice at the top of

the building. In constructing the miniature, the individual bricks were made from balsa wood while the tiered arches were carved from a sculpting material known as Balsa-Foam®. Bricks were then painted terra cotta and mortar was added.



Produce

When Earl's store was operating, the common practice was to set produce along the front sidewalk. Because of our unique scale (1:8), we had to make all the produce from scratch. After reviewing the online portfolios

of three food artisans, Hawaiian Kiva Atkinson was selected to create the individual fruits, vegetables and smoked meats from a supplied list. As she worked, I created the crates, a bushel basket and egg barrel.



Chalkboard with 1920's prices.



Produce placed left of entry.



Produce placed right of entry.



The weighing scale



Potatoes, breads, eggs and watermelons are located inside the double entry doors. A discarded cigar lies on the sidewalk outside, in front of the green apples.



Grocery Products

The 1920s witnessed a transition from clerked to clerkless stores where customers could pick products themselves. It was a major revolution in food merchandising as it allowed people to see the package up close, read the label, and compare it to the competition. Some 42 national and regional

grocery brands from the 1920s are represented in miniature and displayed in Earl's store windows.

Most products are shelved along ornate, mahogany bookcases. Also displayed are smoked meats from the Carter Farm that were sold in Earl's store and on the farm's commissary.





Construction:

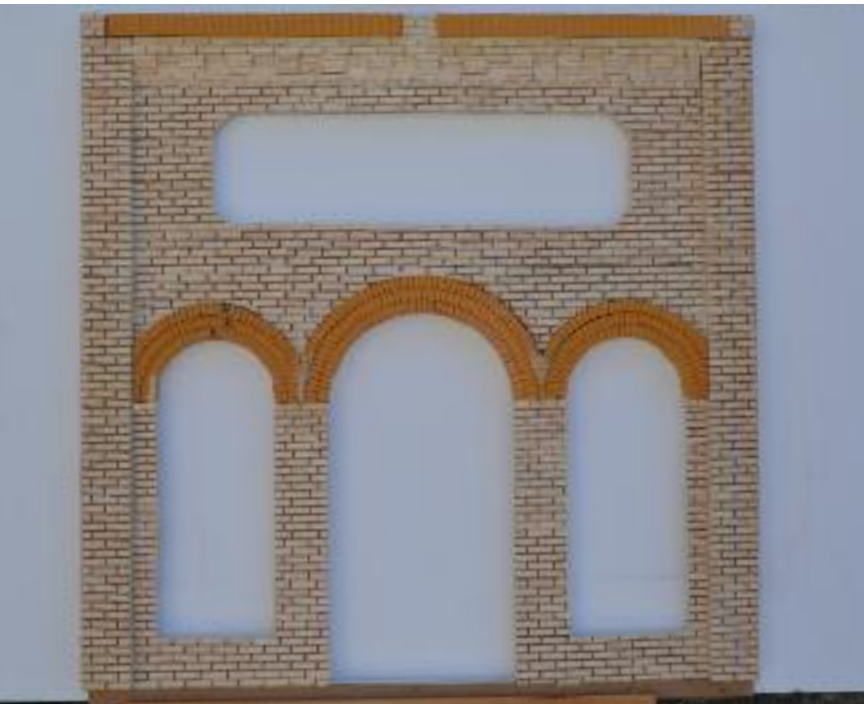
Top: The balsa wood bricks were laid one at a time and glued to a 1/2" thick rigid foam board.

Center: The finished facade before painting. The light colored bricks are made from balsa wood; the yellow-orange bricks are carved from Balsa-Foam®, a plastic foam that carves easily, holds intricate detail, and can be painted like balsa wood. After carving, the foam is coated with Plastic Varnish to harden it for durability.

Bottom: Once everything dried, the facade was given several coats of color (Satin Cinnamon by Rust-Oleum®). To serve as the mortar, a wood filler was tinted light grey and a flexible spreader worked it into the mortar joints.

Mahogany 1" x 6" boards were used to build the shadow box that attached to the rear. The box held the window displays, the ceiling fans, and the interior lighting that operated by a rocker switch discretely positioned behind the cornice.

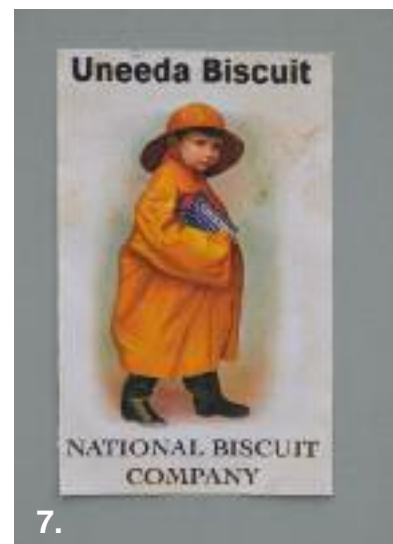
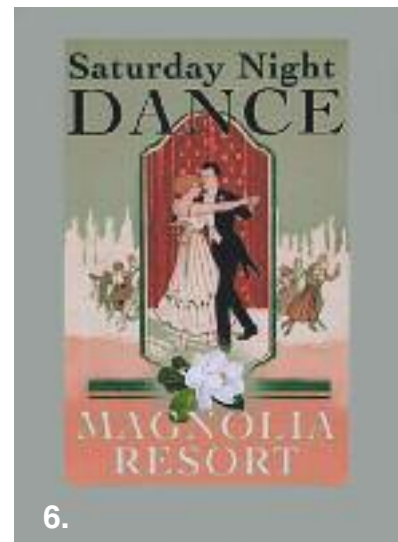
Below: Presentation day, July 13, 2016 at the Carter Center and Presidential Library in Atlanta.



To see additional work by Thomas Norpell visit [Flickr.com/photos/thomasnorpell](https://www.flickr.com/photos/thomasnorpell)

Decor Accessories

A variety of wall-hanging accessories reflect the technology of the day, the promotional posters from grocery manufacturers, and provide items of personal relevance to President and Mrs. Carter.



1. A framed, vintage map of Georgia and an interior photo of a Victorian grocery store.
2. A Victorian wall clock and a car dealer's calendar, the latter showing Earl's Ford Runabout and the month of October, 1924 with Wednesday the first circled in red (Jimmy's birthday).
3. A cathedral radio with Georgia Peach and biscuit posters.
4. A poster celebrating the profession of nursing and a Jell-O desert poster supplied to grocers by the manufacturer.
5. A candlestick telephone of the era. The quarter shows scale.
6. An imagined poster advertising the Saturday Night Dance at the Magnolia Resort where Earl and Lillian dated early on.
7. A popular National Biscuit Company Poster from the 1920s.

Specifications

Completion Time: 20 weeks. **Weight:** 22 lbs.

Dimensions: 30" wide by 29" high by 9-1/2" deep.

Illumination: Two LED strip lights with a working life of 40,000 hours. Electric Cord Length: 8-1/2 ft.

Controls: A concealed on/off switch is mounted top center on the shadow box behind the cornice. A small slider next to the switch serves as a dimmer control.

Presentation Plaque:

*Presented To
President Jimmy Carter and First Lady Rosalynn Carter
"Papa and Mom"
With love from,
Caron Griffin Morgan and Steve Morgan
James Earl Carter IV and Sally Hartley Carter
Kathryn Morgan Stempler and Justin Stempler
and Morgan Stempler
July 13, 2016*

