Mr "Lemm" of Lemm's Corner

A rather peculiar advertisement in The Times of Hermanus of 20 August 1980, ended an era of 20 years of shop-keeping. The same paper reported: “since opening in Hermanus, Lemm’s Corner has become almost a family institution to Hermanus residents — ‘from the napkin to the wedding’. They have seen the children from babies in arms grow up and become young men and women”. “The deciding factor for closing was the threat of demolition of a building constantly needing repairs and modernisation.” “Hermanus residents have expressed their regrets at the departure of the Lemonskys, but the sheer economics of the situation have finally brought about the decision.”

On a sweltering February afternoon, I drive into upper-Oranjezicht, Cape Town, park beneath a shady tree for a special appointment. Anxiously I walk up the steps and ring the bell. The door opens and a kindly, elderly gentleman welcomes me. Bernard Lemonsky —the man whose name lives on in a corner in central Hermanus. Lemm’s Corner has become as famous as the fisherman’s village. It is the regular meeting place of crafters, buyers and browsers, for various celebrations and for the annual Radio Pulpit service. In our ensuing talk, it was evident that Bernard Lemonsky had a specific ‘before and after Hermanus’ period. His father, Solomon Lemonsky came from Latvia to Cape Town in early 1900 and started a drapery business in the old Dock Road. That’s where Bernard was born and bred. In the 1950s the docks area was enlarged. When Sidney Oblowitz, a school chum, in 1960 invited him to take over his general dealers shop in Hermanus, Lemonsky closed the Cape Town shop and he and his wife moved to Hermanus where they soon became a household name. Lemonsky has three passions in life— music, photography and books. When he was seven his father gave him a little camera which he loved. Later he bought some books on photography and equipment to develop and enlarge his work. Soon he produced prize winning photos, and magazines asked to publish his pictures. I saw much of his early work. He became friends with renowned artist Gregoire Boonzaier, a friendship that continues to this day. His bookshelves are filled with interesting volumes. Being a keen collector of classical music, he became friendly with Prof Con de Villiers — they often shared music. He often held music concerts for the staff and students of Camphill in the upper hall above Lemm’s Stores. The Lemonskys settled in Cape Town in 1980. Elizabeth passed away three years ago. Their only child, Ruth, lives in Scotland. Today “Mr Lemm” (87) leads a quiet life with his music, books and TV, and reminisces with nostalgia about their Hermanus days.