

Tour of Downtown Owensboro in the 1890's

By William Foster Hayes
(1868-1964)

From book, Sixty Years of Owensboro, 1883-1943, by William Foster Hayes, Messenger Job Printing Co., Owensboro, KY, c1944, pages 38-47:

A SURVEY OF FIFTY YEARS AGO

As I look back at the Owensboro of the early nineties it seems to me that the general pattern of the main business district, and indeed of much of the central residence portion as well, was much the same as it is now. It is true that garages and filling stations were then unknown and that a number of the business houses of that day have been substantially improved or replaced by new and larger ones, but many of them are still standing and in a few instances are occupied by the same firms or their natural and legitimate successors. The population then was about 10,000. The area of the city was much less than it is now as it has expanded in every direction, even (considering the Bridge) across the river.

Transportation was by the mule car, the street car system not becoming electrified until about the middle or later nineties. (By 1903 electric cars had been in use several years and had been improved so that they were then described as "handsome vestibule cars.")

There was of course no automobile and the traveler by horse and buggy was likely to find himself plowing through deep mud or enveloped in clouds of dust as the weather-god might ordain. There were however very good sidewalks in much of the city, so if the reader will take a walking survey with me I hope he will find it not without interest.

Standing at the intersection of Fourth and Frederica Streets, we note that on the southeast corner, destined to be the site of the Hotel Owensboro (opened in December 1926), was a two-story residence in which Mrs. Walter McFarland kept a popular boarding house. Beyond that to the south and on the east of Frederica was, the residence of Dr. Josiah Hale, afterwards and still that of his daughter Mrs. J. Allen Dean, Sr., and until his death, Mr. Dean. Farther south was the residence of Benjamin Bransford, also soon to be used as a boarding house and later to give way to the Post Office or Federal Building. On the southwest corner stood the present Cary building, then known as the Central Trust Company building, which housed also the Owensboro National Bank. The northeast corner was occupied then or shortly after by the present building, and the remainder of the block to the east was about as now. The corner building at St. Ann was soon to become the seat of the Owensboro Home Telephone Company (which succeeded the Owensboro-Harrison Telephone Company, incorporated, in 1895). In 1903 the Home Company, located in this building, boasted a thousand subscribers and its switchboard was competently presided over by Miss Jennie Sample. The City Hall and Fire Department were in their present location.

Continuing east on Fourth Street, we pass the same churches and many of the same residences that we find today. Settle Memorial, however, was rebuilt in 1904-5, a few lots then

vacant have since been improved and a few residences have been replaced by business houses, as at the northwest and southeast corners of Fourth and Lewis. Towards the eastern end of the street were a few business houses including a flouring mill on the south side of Fourth near Triplett, built and for some years occupied by Joshua C. Terrill, and later by C. W. Bransford, who is mentioned more than once in these pages. And at the intersection of Fourth and the Leitchfield Road the present building was then occupied as a dry goods and clothing emporium by J. R. Laswell. Yes, our veteran realtor was then a thriving merchant.

A little further and on the north side of the street, were the great buildings of the Owensboro Wagon Company, which suggests the prominent names of Josh T. Griffith, Dr. Robert Brodie and W. A. Steele, all now deceased. (See at the end of this chapter.)

The Owensboro Wagon Company was probably then and for a number of years the largest manufacturing concern in Owensboro, and is one of the oldest. In early years its chief product was the Owensboro wagon, the making of which has never been entirely discontinued, but later it turned out truck trailers and bodies, and very recently has been manufacturing coolie hand carts for use in China. Ownership of the company largely changed hands in May 1943, by the transfer of the stock of former directors, except that of Mr. John A. Bransford, to R. Hal Compton of St. Louis and Owensboro and some associates of South Bend, Indiana.

Going over to Main (now officially Second) Street and turning west, at the foot of Triplett Street was the plant of the old Owensboro Water Works (see under the head of Utilities). The block in Second between Triplett and Bolivar was built up much the same as now. H. L. Koltinsky had a wholesale grocery there, the Farmers & Traders Bank was located near the center of the block, and Mullen & Haynes were there though their store did not extend down to Bolivar as now, the corner building then being occupied by Mitchell & Haynes, dry goods. The great wholesale drug firm of Mullen & Haynes, now the Mullen & Haynes Co., was founded probably in the early eighties, by Geo. W. Mullen and J. Quint Haynes, and was managed for many years by A. Roy Miller, who at his death, January 25, 1941, was the oldest druggist in point of service in Owensboro. He had been in that business more than fifty years but had severed his connection with this company some years before.

Bell's Hotel at the northwest corner of Second and Bolivar was probably standing then as now. Farther down, Barrett's saddlery and harness store was conducted for many years in a building now standing. Guenther & Wright's Machine Shop (now the Wright Machine Co.) was operating, and at the foot of Crittenden Street what was then Broecker's Mill, later the Murphy Grain and Milling Co., which was recently destroyed by fire.

Opposite the Third Street (now Washington) school, in the buildings still standing, R. McJohnston & Co. conducted their wholesale grocery establishment. Robert P. McJohnston, the head of this firm, was one of Owensboro's most prominent businessmen and certainly one of the finest looking, a man of magnificent and commanding physique and of corresponding ability. He was greatly successful in business, but left Owensboro many years ago going first to New York and later to California, where his superb constitution stood him in such stead that he rounded out his century of life in June 1942, dying in the following October.

Associated with Mr. McJohnston was Charles W. Wilhoyte, who before the turn of the century met a tragic death. He was fond of driving and had a fast-gaited, high-spirited horse. Driving that animal on the outskirts of the city, perhaps on Griffith Avenue, it became unmanageable, ran away, and he was thrown from the buggy and killed. Even after this lapse of years I remember Mr. McJohnston's sorrowful and impressive comment, "I admonished him, I admonished him."

On Lewis Street, as elsewhere stated, the Owensboro and Nashville railroad came in and the passenger station was located between Second Street and the river, a site now overshadowed by the Great Owensboro Bridge.

The building at the southwest corner of Main and Lewis, now used as a retail grocery, housed at that time the F. T. Gunther wholesale grocery. Farther west on the same block, Capt. F. L. Hall had his furniture store, at least in the late eighties, succeeded early in the next decade by Martin & Smith, in the same business. M. D. L. Martin and our own E. W. Smith came from Water Valley, Mississippi. Mr. Martin died in a very few years, and Mr. Smith remained in the furniture business a number of years, being located on the north side of the street in the next block to the west. Both before and since retiring from that business he has devoted himself unsparingly and competently to many movements for the general good of the community, so that he easily qualifies as one of Owensboro's most useful citizens.

At the southeast corner of Main or Second and Daviess there was a thriving mercantile establishment founded Sept. 13, 1889, by one of Owensboro's ablest business men and most estimable and valuable citizens.. It was the S. W. Anderson Store, which has since moved across Daviess Street and become the S. W. Anderson Company. Coming to Owensboro at that time in his mature middle age, Mr. Anderson's acumen, energy and integrity soon placed him in the front rank of our business circles. But he was far more than a business man. An alert inquiring mind, avid of knowledge of various subjects, widely read, a ready and an attractive speaker, he was one of the ornaments of the Investigators' Club. Public spirited and earnestly and consistently religious, he was a potent influence in the higher life of the city. For many years Mr. Anderson was able to give close attention to his expanding business, and as his strength declined in advanced age, the responsibility fell more and more heavily on his son-in-law and worthy successor J. Ernest Arnold who succeeded to the presidency of the company on Mr. Anderson's death, which occurred November 28, 1923.

Mr. Arnold had come to Owensboro and to the Anderson store within a short time after the business was founded, was trained in the same business principles on which the founder had established his success, shared his ideals and was characterized by the same geniality and courtesy. Under his direction the prosperity of the business was uninterrupted, as indeed it still is; but unfortunately Mr. Arnold's health gave way and he died at a comparatively early age in October 1936.

The north side of this block (east of Daviess) was dominated by the great department store of H. B. Phillips & Co., established in 1881. This in its later development through Phillips Bros. & McAtee to the present McAtee, Lyddane & Ray is the oldest and one of the largest department stores in Owensboro. This business was established by Mr. H. B. Phillips of Lebanon, Kentucky (who afterwards lived for a time in Owensboro), possibly in connection with Mr. Tyler W. McAtee, as the name given above was in use in 1883. Later the business seems to have been divided. At one time the firm was H. B. Phillips & Co. (or perhaps Bro.) and in 1903 was the Phillips Brauer, Hays Co. (J. D. Hays was a prominent business man here for a number of years.) Yet the present firm advertises that it was founded in 1899. The founders were Mr. McAtee, John A. Lyddane and Lee D. Ray, and for a number of years the location has been on the northwest corner of Second and Daviess.

On the southwest corner of Second and Daviess, now the site of the S. W. Anderson store, stood the Temple Theater, for some years Owensboro's chief theater building, where many lecturers (some mentioned in these pages) and other entertainers were heard. I remember too one series of religious services conducted there by the Rev. George R. Stuart in the fall of 1906. Farther

west in that block (south side) were the undertaking establishment of H. W. Miller and the buggy and harness store of John G. Delker. Across Second Street at the east side of Allen was the great clothing house of B. Wile & Sons, afterwards Wile Brothers.

Crossing Allen Street, the corner, now the site of the Citizens State Bank, was occupied by the grocery of W. F. Reinhardt & Brother (L. H. Reinhardt). Beyond that going west was the W. E. & I. N. Parrish book store. John C. Frederick's hardware store (perhaps succeeding S. Drabelle) and other business houses intervened between that and the corner which was occupied then or not much later by the Bank of Commerce. This block on both sides of Second Street, was solidly built then as now.

Returning to the east end of this block, north side, the Owensboro Savings Bank had for some years occupied the corner building now housing a store and offices. Other houses in the block were A. J. Mitchell (dry goods), with whom was Mrs. R. N. Elliott's Millinery business; Braun's hotel; F. B. Hackett, clothing, probably where B. L. Duncan & Son had been; A. J. Williams (possibly succeeding in the Hackett location near the middle of the block early, in the nineties); Eugene Gasser's bakery. (Levy's has been at its present location since about 1900.)

Turning south on St. Ann, there was the Rudd House then new. It was later greatly damaged by fire and was rebuilt in 1899 (30 new rooms added about 1941). The remainder of the block until we reach the Masonic Temple was substantially as it is now, and on the site of the Masonic building, in the old Hall's Opera House building, was B. J. Jansing's furniture store and a little to the north I. H. Robertson's shoe store.

Smith & Bates drug store was at the southeast corner, of Third and St. Ann as how. Going down Third opposite the Court House some old buildings stood on the present site of the Odd Fellows Building, and Walter P. Howard had a printing establishment where the Hardin Printing Company now is. Further down was John A. Head's drug store, ere long succeeded by Rice E Gregory, and on the corner the First National Bank, now the First-Owensboro Bank and Trust Company.

On the west side of Frederica opposite the Court House, then as now the Planters Hotel at the Third Street corner and W. A. Guenther & Sons (later evolving into the Guenther Hardware Company) dominated the interior of the block Mr. W. A. Guenther, a native of Germany, had come to Owensboro with his family about 1875. Three of his sons, J. Ed., Albert B., and Frank B., were associated with him in this business. After his death the late J. Ed. Guenther became the head of the firm and was for some years one of Owensboro's leading business men. His son-in-law, Walter F. Davis, is now the vice-president and manager of the company.

Just to the north of the hardware store a drug store had already been kept for a number of years, as it has since been continuously, and John Friedman was working there. It had been Courtney's drug store some time back, then Brashear and Crosier, and about the time of our survey, Brashear & Wimp. Mr. Friedman clerked for those two firms seven years, and in February, 1897, became proprietor himself and has continued to carry on the business at the same stand.

The north block opposite the Court House was solidly built and many of the buildings of that day are still there What is now the Maglinger Hardware building seems to have a comparatively new front and may have been largely rebuilt. Back of that, towards the river, an old brick building fronting on Frederica still shows on its side the sign of Perkins & Manning, an old liquor firm of half a century ago. In the center of the Second Street block, on the second floor, the great legal firm of Sweeney, Ellis & Sweeney had their offices for years.

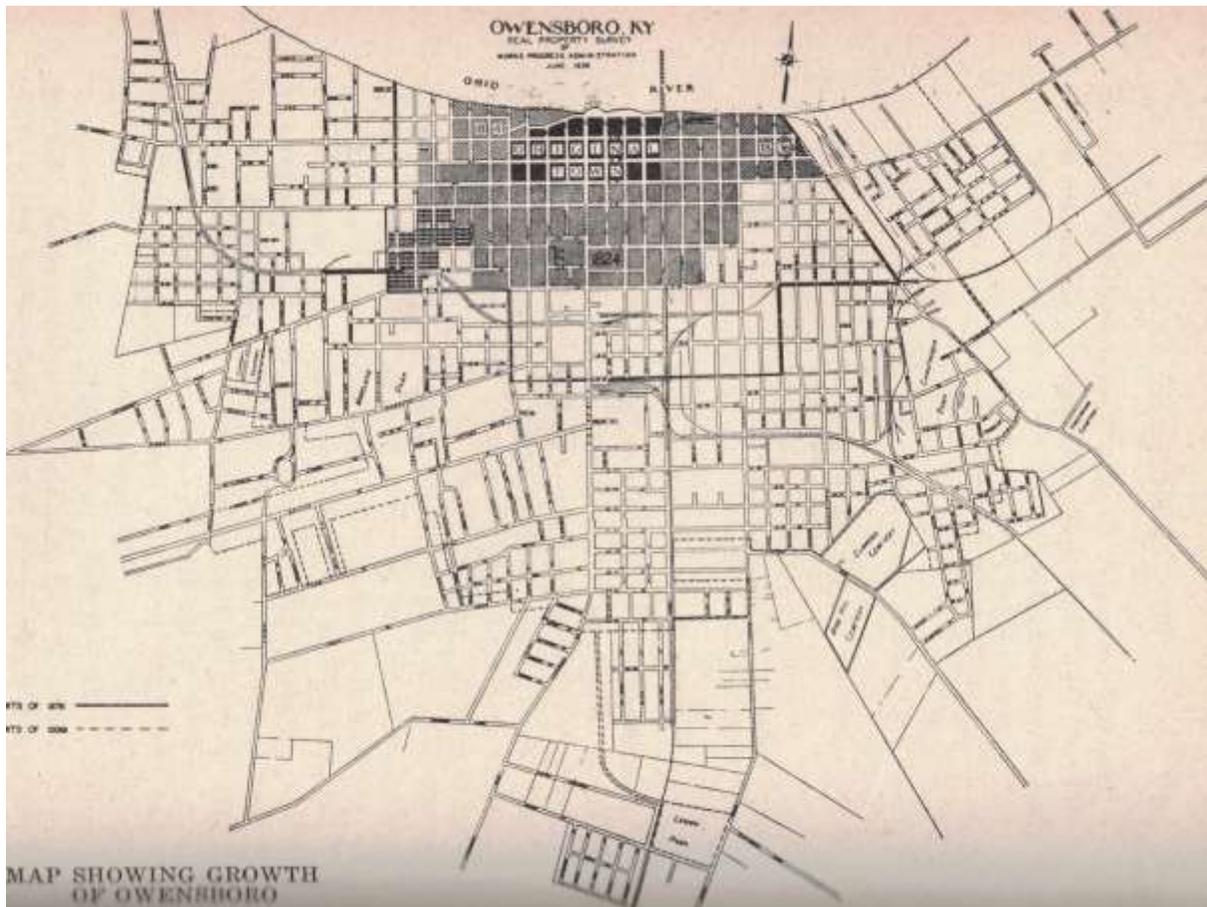
Returning to the corner of Third and Frederica, there was in Frederica between Third and Fourth among other houses that of George & Otis Parrish (the lower Parrish book store). They

were at one time on the east side and at another on the west side of the street. A hotel known as the Robey House was on the east side south of the bank building. And (do you remember way back when?), near the center of the block and extending through to St. Ann, lingered Logan J. Smith's livery stable, while another, Brotherton's, fronted Frederica from the west at Fourth. The National Deposit Bank completed and occupied its present building at Third and Frederica in December, 1923.

To the west on Third at St. Elizabeth was the Ames Buggy factory, and on Fourth at Cedar (formerly called Mulberry) was Gilbert's mill, which burned several years ago. South of Fourth on the west side of Frederica was the Famous Steam Laundry of Katterjohn and Vanarsdel.

Outlying in different directions were other industrial plants.: The tobacco stemmeries, mentioned in another chapter; several planing mills, J. N. Gradys on Ninth at the head of Crittenden, John R. Osborne & Son at Seventh and Lewis, J. V. Stimson & Brother, farther out on Moseley street. The Owensboro Wheel factory was on the west side of Daviess near Ninth, the Owensboro Foundry Company, at Fifth and Poplar (Guthrie & Long succeeded by Bransford & Wisdom). The Owensboro Forging Company on west Second. Street was not incorporated until 1903.

Pictures from Sixty Years of Owensboro, 1883-1943,
pages 21, 23, 25, 36, 123, 146, 203 and 214:





AN EARLY MORNING SCENE IN OWENSBORO.

TOBACCO MARKETING SCENE—ABOUT 1900



SLEET SCENE JANUARY 1902—ODD FELLOWS AND COURT HOUSE



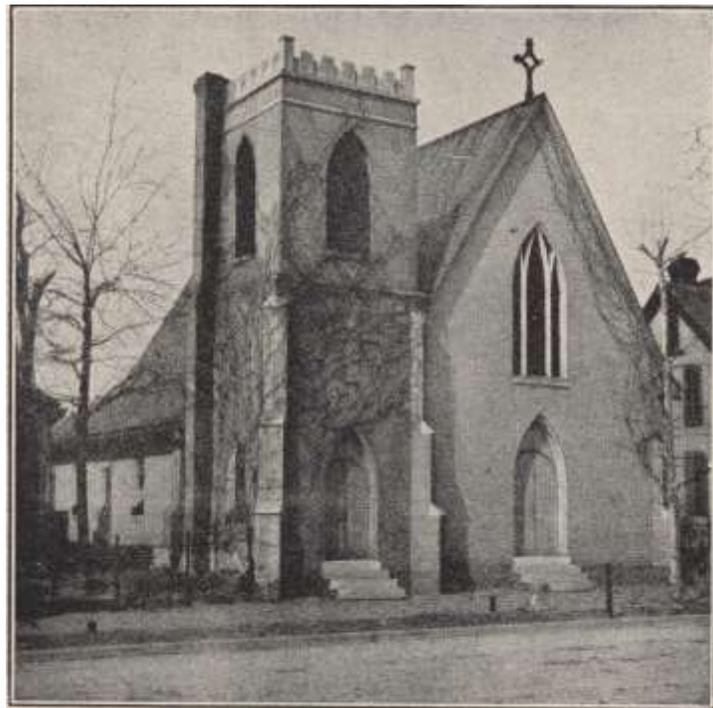
1937 FLOOD SCENE—FREDERICA AND FIRST STREETS



1937 FLOOD SCENE—MAIN AND ST. ANN STREETS



ST. STEPHENS CATHEDRAL



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH



THE OWENSBORO BRIDGE ACROSS THE OHIO RIVER