

Anthony Alexander Avritt (1864-1950)

By Jerry Long
c.2024



History of Kentucky: The Blue Grass State, Volume IV, (Chicago, IL & Louisville, KY: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1928), pp.138 & 141:

ANTHONY A. AVRITT

Anthony A. Avritt is conducting a profitable general repair shop in Owensboro and by his industrious and useful life has gained the esteem and friendship of all who know him. Mr. Avritt was born in Bradfordsville, Marion county, Kentucky on the 22d of July, 1864 and is a son of Thomas G. and Julia (Thornton) Avritt. The paternal grandparents were James and Mary Avritt, both of whom were natives of Virginia and are now deceased, the father dying in Owensboro and the mother in Missouri. He was a teamster by occupation, a member of the Christian church and voted the republican ticket. Thomas G. Avritt was born at Bradfordsville in 1837, followed the business of plastering and died in Owensboro September 16, 1922. He was a veteran of the Civil war, in which he sustained a wound in the foot. He was a republican and a member of the First Christian church of Owensboro. His wife was born in Marion county, Kentucky, June 9, 1836, and died in Owensboro, July 11, 1920. She was the daughter of Harrison and Mary (Purdy) Thornton, the former of whom was born in Marion county, Kentucky and died in Elville, this state He followed the trade of a shoemaker, voted the democratic ticket and belonged to the Christian church. His wife was born, lived and died in Marion county.

Anthony A. Avritt was educated in the public schools of Owensboro and then went to work in the planing mill of J. B. Griffin & Company, where he was employed ten years, after which he was for six years in J. N. Grady's planing mill .In 1904 he engaged in the general repair of bicycles, guns, etc., in which he has continued to the present time, with the exception of the years 1907 to 1909, when he was connected with the Roots Dry Goods Company, at Terre Haute, Indiana By close and painstaking attention to his business, he has been rewarded with gratifying success and is regarded as a reliable and dependable man in whatever he undertakes to do.

Mr. Avritt has been married twice. On April 3, 1903 [should be 1894], near Whitesville, Kentucky, he wedded Miss Annie Berry, who was born in 1881, and died in Whitesville in 1904 [should be 1896]. She was the daughter of the late J. M. Berry, of that place To this union was born a daughter, Maggie Hale, who is now deceased. On October 10, 1910, in Rockport, Indiana, Mr. Avritt married Miss Katie Johnson, who was born November 8, 1881, daughter of the late Benjamin Johnson, of Owensboro, a carpenter and builder and a highly respected resident of this city. Mrs. Avritt received her education in the Owensboro public schools and is an active member

of the Third Baptist church. Mr. Avritt is a staunch supporter of the democratic party and is a member of the First Christian church to which he gives generous support. Personally he is a kindly and genial gentleman, courteous and accommodating, and has a host of warm friends throughout the community.



References to Anthony A. Avritt / Averitt in the Newspapers of Owensboro, KY

- Owensboro Weekly Messenger – 1889: 3/14 p.8 (makes a trip to Henderson on a bicycle in 5 hours),
- Owensboro Messenger – 1889: 5/9 p.4 (A. A. Averitt will give a bicycle exhibition),
- Owensboro Messenger – 1889: 5/23 p.4 (exhibition of bicycle riding),
- Owensboro Messenger – 1890: 1/17 p.4 (gives a bicycle exhibition at rink),
- Owensboro Messenger – 1890: 4/11 p.1 (Anthony Averitt to open a bicycle and gun repair shop),
- Owensboro Messenger – 1896: 8/4 p.8 (Annie Averitt died 2 August 1896, about 20, leaves one child, buried Whitesville; recently was divorced from A. A. Averitt),
- Owensboro Inquirer – 1899: 1/12 p.4 (Anthony Averitt went to Terre Haute, IN to visit his brother, Harry Averitt),
- Owensboro Messenger – 1902: 6/13 p.2 (A. A. Averitt is building a locomotive),
- Owensboro Messenger – 1904: 3/9 p.5 (Averitt gives his automobile a trial run),
- Owensboro Messenger – 1904: 6/21 p.3 (completes a kitchen cabinet),
- Owensboro Inquirer – 1904: 11/2 p.4 (purchases machinery of the Owensboro Machine Supply Co.),
- Owensboro Messenger – 1905: 1/27 p.3 (company of Averitt to be in building being erected at corner of Main & Bolivar),
- Owensboro Inquirer – 1905: 2/24 p.4 (has built a horseless delivery wagon, the machine will run by a powerful gasoline engine, it is the second automobile he has made, the first being a run-about made several years ago, he is the proprietor of the Novelty Manufacturing & Repair Works on South Frederica),
- Owensboro Messenger – 1905: 2/25 p.2 (A. A. Averitt making an automobile),
- Owensboro Messenger – 1905: 3/31 p.1 (completes automobile),
- Owensboro Inquirer – 1905: 3/31 p.8 (he has completed the automobile delivery wagon on which he has been engaged for some time),
- Owensboro Inquirer – 1905: 8/16 p.5 (Mrs. Thomas Spencer, of Evansville, IN has been visiting her brother, A. A. Averitt, in Owensboro, left this morning for Robards, where she will visit relatives before returning home),
- Owensboro Inquirer – 1905: 9/15 p.4 (wrecks his automobile in order to save a dog),
- Owensboro Messenger – 1906: 8/18 p.5 (A. A. Avritt's automobile collides with a street car),
- Owensboro Messenger – 1907: 1/24 p.2 (A. A. Averitt moves his shop to a new location),
- Owensboro Messenger – 1909: 6/22 p.5 (A. A. Averitt opens a repair shop),
- Owensboro Messenger – 1911: 1/8 p.8 (moves shop to 319 West Fourth Street),

- Owensboro Messenger – 1912: 2/8 p.8 (first to build an automobile in Owensboro),
- Owensboro Inquirer – 1924: 5/29 p.4B ("General Repair Business Done By A. A. Averitt", who opened shop in Owensboro in 1904, born in Bradfordsville, came to Owensboro at age of 5, made the first pair of skates, first bicycle and the first automobile used in Owensboro, shop is located at 319 West Fourth Street, ad on p.11C),
- Owensboro Messenger – 1924: 6/18 p.4(advertisement by A. A. Averitt),
- Owensboro Messenger – 1938: 1/16 p.3B ("A. A. 'Tony' Averitt Built His First Skates, Car and Bicycle"),
- Owensboro Messenger – 1942: 4/16 p.8B ("Bicycling Isn't What It Used To Be – That's Consensus Of Three Old-Timers Here"),
- Owensboro Messenger – 1944: 11/12 p.4A (Anthony Averitt wins Popular Science Monthly Magazine award),
- Owensboro Messenger – 1949: 3/3 p.8 (Mrs. Katie B. Averitt, wife of A. A. Tony Averitt, died 2 March 1949 at home in Owensboro; born 8 November 1882 in Owensboro; survived by husband & four sisters),
- Owensboro Messenger – 1950: 9/3 p.9A (A. A. Avritt died in Bellville, Ill. 2 September 1950),
- Owensboro Messenger – 1950: 9/6 p.4 (burial will be at Rose Hill Cemetery in Owensboro),
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1958: 12/7 p.1E ("Kettering Influenced Local Autos", A. A. (Tony) Avritt and one or two friends used Avritt's bicycle shop to put one of the first cars together here. Like Ames, they used a Continental engine and purchased other component parts.),
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1976: 5/23 p.5C (three pictures of aerial views of Owensboro taken about 1902 by A. A. Avritt),
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1976: 6/6 Bicentennial section Part II, p.29 ("Wild horses, mutts didn't stop the auto", in 1905 Anthony A. Averitt wrecks car to avoid hitting a dog),
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1976: 6/6 Bicentennial section Part II, p.28 (picture of Bolivar Street about 1900 by Anthony Avritt, a local bicycle repairman),
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1976: 6/6 Bicentennial section Part II, p.26 (picture of landing of the steamer Morning Star at the Owensboro riverfront by A. A. Avritt),
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1976: 10/15 p.1C (picture of train on West 11th Street about 1900 by A. A. Avritt),
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1976: 12/5 p.p.2E (three pictures of the opening of Seven Hills in 1900 by A. A. Avritt),
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1976: 12/12 p.2E (picture of 1902 Owensboro sleet storm by A. A. Avritt),
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1977: 1/12 p.1B (picture of ice in Ohio River around 1900 by A. A. Avritt),
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1977: 1/16 p.2C (two pictures of 1902 sleet storm in Owensboro by A. A. Avritt),
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1977: 4/10 p.3E (picture of Kentucky State Guard encampment near Hickman Park in 1901 by A. A. Avritt),

- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1977: 6/5 p.3C (two pictures by A. A. Avritt of the Owensboro Elks street fair in the spring of 1901),
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1977: 7/2 p.1A (“City cyclists held Sour Mash Meet”, By 1890, Owensboro was in a bicycle craze. Transportation was improved and a new method of pleasure seeking had been found. Almost as soon as bicycles arrived on the scene locally, they were being raced first on the streets and then on makeshift tracks. There were enough bicycles here by April 1890 for A.A. Avritt to open a gun and bicycle repair shop on Third Street),
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1977: 9/25 p.4E (picture of the Great Sleet Storm of January 1902 by “A. A. Avritt, an amateur photographer, who spent a lot of time around the turn of the century capturing Owensboro on film”),
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1977: 11/4 p.3D (“Riding back in time: Bikes built the roads”, A. A. Avritt in April 1889 made a name for himself locally as a bicyclist. He performed trick and fancy riding at the opera house here and at other towns in the area),
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1977: 11/30 p.1E (Tony Avritt one of two locksmiths in Owensboro),
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 2002: 7/28 pp.1C & 3C (“local librarians handle treasures from across state”, Kentucky Room at the Daviess County Public Library houses clock built by Anthony A. Averitt),
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 2005: 9/11 pp.1A & 2 A (“A century of crashes: Centennial of city’s first accident this week”, Anthony A. "Tony" Averitt had first car accident in the city on 14 September 1905),
- A. A. Avritt was also named in numerous personals and business advertisements.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 14 March 1889, p.8:

Anthony Averitt went to Henderson yesterday. He made the trip on a bicycle in five hours.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 9 May 1889, p.4:

A. A. Averitt will give a bicycle exhibition at Hall's opera-house Thursday night. His trick and fancy cycling is extremely interesting. Admission 15 cents; gallery, 10 cents.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 17 January 1890, p.4:

Anthony Averitt will give a bicycle exhibition at the rink Saturday night. A band of music will be in attendance.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 11 April 1890, p.1:

Anthony Averitt, the bicycle rider, has bought George Christman's tools and outfit and will open a gun and bicycle repairing shop in the rear of the U. S. Express office on Third street.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 4 August 1896, p.8:

Mrs. Annie Averitt, of Whitesville, died Sunday morning, and was buried there Monday. Mrs. Averitt was about twenty years of age. She leaves one child. She was divorced from her husband, A. A. Averitt, of this city, at the last term of the circuit court.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 13 June 1902, p.2:

BUILDING LOCOMOBILE.
Will Take A. A. Averitt Eighteen
Months to Complete It.

A. A. Avritt. who works at Griffin's planing mill, is busy during spare hours on a four and a half horse-power locomobile which he is constructing. It will carry four people and is arranged trap-fashion so as to show one or two seats. It Is a steam machine, but will be heated by gasoline. Its speed is gauged to be from twenty-five to thirty miles an hour. The boiler is of steel and contains 300 half-inch tubes. It will be entirely safe. The engine is a composition of brass and gun metal. The wheels will be fashioned after buggy wheels, but will be heavier. They will be rubber-tired and thirty inches in diameter. The body is planned after an original idea of Avritt himself, but some features are modeled after the locomobile of Mr. E. G. Bucker, the second one brought to Owensboro, the first being that brought here by the Homestead Land company. Mr. Avritt is quite an ingenious mechanic and has invented several new designs in cabinets.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 9 March 1904, p.5:

Several months ago L. A. Basham constructed an automobile. The making of the machine was only an experiment on the part of Mr. Basham. It was left in the rough form and, therefore, did not run with the ease of the regular manufactured machines. It was purchased by Anthony Averitt, of the Novelty Manufacturing and Repair works. Mr. Averitt has been working on the reconstruction of the machine for several months in his shop, on South Frederica street. He has supplied it with a six-horse power gasoline engine, and has made it almost entirely over. He had the "red devil" out on Frederica street on yesterday afternoon giving it a trial. For the first trial the machine ran exceptionally well, it is a nobby looking machine of the "run about" style. It is painted red and its wheels are of the small rubber-tired buggy variety.

Mr. Averitt says the machine will be in good running order within a very few days. As yet the machinery is stiff and a few minor improvements are to be made. Mr. Averitt will retain the machine, for his private use.



Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 2 November 1904, p.4:

SOLD EVERYTHING

Owensboro Machine Supply Company to Go Out of Business.

The Owensboro Machine Supply Co. has sold out its stock and machinery. Lees Machine works has taken all of the supplies and the machinery has been sold to A. A. Averitt. The business was established about a year ago the partners being Messrs Ed Delker and A. J. Daniels. Both had other interests which required their attention and they decided to close out the business of the Machine Supply company.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 27 January 1905, p.3:



A lot at the corner of Main and Bolivar street has been bought by Dr. R P. Keene and, as soon as he can get a building permit from the city council and the weather permits, he will begin the erection of a substantial business house on the lot. It will be one hundred feet long by twenty-four wide. As soon as completed the house will be occupied by A. Averitt & Co. and the business to be conducted will be known as the Novelty Manufacturing and Repair house.

Mr. Averitt will remove from his present stand on Frederica street, near the "Texas' depot, where he has been for the past two years and where he has built up a very good trade. This will be continued and added to as soon as the new house is occupied.

A variety of up-to-date machinery will be put in for the purpose of building and repairing gasoline boats, making many things and repairing anything made of iron, doing all kinds of wood work, repairing furniture and manufacturing novel grades and special orders of furniture, making and repairing bicycles and other features such as this partial enumeration will suggest. Repairs on automobiles will be made and to a limited extent, these machines will be manufactured. A new auto to be used by the firm as a delivery wagon is now being constructed by Mr. Averitt. A full supply of all bicycle sundries will also be kept in stock.

Mr. Averitt is very much of a mechanical genius and recently his peculiar talent has had free play, and he has attracted general attention because of his excellent and ingenious workmanship. He is frequently seen on the streets riding in an automobile of his own construction. He was, before starting his own business at his present stand, in the employ of the Grady planing mill.

Dr. Keene, also, deserves much credit for the interest he is taking in the prosperity of Owensboro. He has been in the city but a few years, but this is his second investment in Owensboro real estate and in each instance he has bought for the purpose of improving by building.



Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 15 September 1905, p.4:

WRECKED AUTOMOBILE.

Little Dog Proves Too Much for Anthony Averitt's Machine.

Anthony Averitt's automobile is almost a total wreck as a result of a collision with a very small dog belonging to Gunther Petrie. The machine ran against the dog and in order to save the animal Mr. Averitt turned it so suddenly that it went over and was thrown into the gutter. The axle was broken a wheel was smashed and other damage was done.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Saturday, 18 August 1906, p.5:

Auto Runs Into Car.

A. A. Avritt's automobile, driven by himself, collided with a street car at the corner of Main and Frederica streets shortly after noon yesterday. The car was stationary at the time, and no damage was done except that the front axle of the automobile was bent. The collision was caused by a wheel of the machine being caught on the curve of the track between the rail and guard rail.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 24 January 1907, p.2:

In New Location.

Mr. A. A. Averitt has removed his repair shop from 1016 Frederica street to 319 West Fourth street, into the stand formerly occupied by D. S. Clouse. Mr. Averitt , is a practical workman and does any kind of repair work except the fixing of guns and pistols. He makes a specialty of bicycles and automobiles and does a great deal of this kind of work. Mr. Averitt has always had a large trade, but it is believed this will be greatly increased at his new location.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 22 June 1909, p.5:

Opens a Repair Shop

A. A. Averitt, who for some time has been conducting a repair shop in Terre Haute, has moved to this city and opened an up-to-date repair shop on West Third street in the building formerly occupied by P. R. Lancaster & Co. Mr. Averitt will do all kinds of repairing.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 8 January 1911, p.8:

A. A. Averitt, who has been conducting a general repair shop at 319 West Third street, has moved his shop to 319 West Fourth street.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 31 March 1905, p.1:



Mr. A. A. Averitt has completed a new automobile. This one is in the shape and is to be used for the purpose of a delivery wagon. It is very speedy and is supplied with an ample body in which articles may be carried. The space occupied by the machinery is very small and is chiefly under the body proper. Mr. Averitt is proving himself to be quite an expert as a builder of these very useful vehicles.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Saturday, 13 August 1910, p.8:





Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 8 February 1912, p.8:

Anthony Averitt, the popular electrician and mechanic, who holds the distinction of being the first Owensboroian to build an automobile in the city, has recently completed a large passenger car which will be used for, delivery purposes The machine is now on exhibition at his shop on West Fourth street.



**Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Club and Development Edition,
Thursday, 29 May 1924, p.4B:**



The distinction of having made the first pair of skates and also the first bicycle, and the first automobile used in Owensboro belongs to A. A. Averitt, who conducts a bicycle and general repair shop at 319 W. Fourth St.

Mr. Averitt began business here in 1904. In 1907 he moved to Terra Haute, Ind, where he applied his knowledge of machinery for a period of two years. In 1909 he came back to Owensboro and opened a shop at 321 Third St. moving a little later, however, to his present location on Fourth Street.

Mr. Averitt does a general repair shop business together with his bicycle and bicycle sundry trade. He handles the popular Radio anil Pierce-Arrow bicycles and is a great friend of all the younger generation of Owensboro boys — due to his knowledge of their “wheels” and his ability to fix ‘em up.

A. A. Averitt was born in Bradfordsville, Ky., in the heart of the Blue Grass. He moved to Owensboro at the age of five and reared and educated here. He attends the First Christian Church and is a married man.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 18 June 1924, p.4:



Whether You're Six or Sixty
you need a bicycle and the benefits that
come from riding one.

A bicycle develops the youngster—promotes health and strength. It keeps the older "youngsters" in fine fettle, giving them the fresh air that Nature demands. Ours is as fine a line of models as ever gladdened the heart of child or grown-up. They're ready for your inspection—your own and the kiddie's. Why not look 'em over today?

Ride a Bicycle

A. A. AVRITT
I Fix Anything Fixable
319 WEST FOURTH ST.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 16 January 1938, p.3B:

A. A. (Tony) Averitt Built His First Skates, Car And Bicycle

By James Stevens

A distinction held possibly by no other Owensboroan is claimed by A. A. (Tony) Averitt, who made the first ice skates first bicycle and the first automobile he owned. His first ice skates, made when he was but a small boy were built from a hoop of iron obtained from a cooper shop.

His first bicycle was built in the days when high wheelers were in vogue. His first one was made from an old buggy wheel and a gas pipe, with a wooden saddle, covered with cloth. His first automobile is well remembered by many Owensboroans.

In relating some of his experiences with the high wheelers, Tony says they had a funny way of acting in the presence of bricks and other objects lying in the road. Sometimes a rider would get his eye on these objects and hit one in spite of all he would try to do.

One particular incident that he recalled took place in front of an undertaking establishment located where the S. W. Anderson store now stands.

A man was riding up Main street, which was not paved in those days. He had the sad luck of getting his eye on a mud hole and despite his efforts to turn the wheel it headed straight for the puddle causing him to dive head first into the mud.

At one time Tony was a "trick rider." His performances were given in an old skating rink located at the point where the Penney store now stands.

One of his best tricks was called the balancing ladder trick. It was done by placing a ladder on a box so that one end touched the floor on the starting side. Then Tony would ride up the rounds and down the other side without falling.

Another favorite of his was to ride down the street on the high wheeler, stop, turn the front wheel side ways and talk to any of his acquaintances who happened along. This was done without getting off, and he started on his way again when the conversation ended.

A bicycle in those days cost from \$125 to \$150.

Made His First Auto

Not being satisfied with making his own ice skates and bicycle Mr. Averitt also made his first automobile. But, first consider the first car that ran on the streets of Owensboro. It was an electric model owned by the Homestead Land Co., and had a habit of running out of electricity at the wrong time.

Cars were few and far between in those days, but Owensboro finally had two in the community. The second was owned by Ellis Owen and it was of the gasoline type.

About this time the Owensboro Buggy Co., like most other buggy manufacturers at that time, decided to make an automobile. After the first car was built for some reason or other, it would not run properly. Tony said it was because the chain wouldn't stay on. The motor was built directly under the seat and it had a chain running down, then back to the rear axle which for some reason caused the chain to jump off before the car would run very far.

Tony and F. X. Pottinger went together and offered \$150 for the car. The owners said they wanted \$200 for it and that they would run it in the river before they would take less. But, after a few days has passed, they sent Tony word that he could have it for \$150. The deal was settled and the car was taken to the shop in south Frederica street. There it was taken apart and completely rebuilt, with the chain going back to the rear axle in a more direct manner.

35 Miles Per Hour

With the chain drive in the position the car worked very and would travel 35 miles per hour. However, there was one thing wrong Tony couldn't get the car in high gear. Every time he shifted from low to high it would stop the engine. Finally it was discovered that he was shifting gears too last and that the friction caused the motor to stall.

So, early one morning Mr. Averitt and Mr. Pottinger got the car out and started it. There were no horses out on the street that early and after getting the car started they succeeded in getting it in high. For some time, Mr. Averitt recalls, they had a fine time riding at 25 miles per hour around the streets of Owensboro.

On one of the first trips to the country in the car Tony, and Pottinger were out near where the high school now is — that was in the country at that time — when the crank shaft broke. With the motor under the seat it made a lot of noise as it broke. Mr. Pottinger leaped from the machine and headed for town on foot in a hurry.



A. A. (Tony) Averitt is shown above with a miniature "Tallyho" which he built during his spare time. The carriage, complete in every detail, was built over a period of a year and a half.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 26 April 1942, p.8B:

Bicycling Isn't What It Used To Be –
That's Consensus Of Three Old-Timers Here

Sight of Ancient Bike Brings Memories.

By John W. Potter, Owensboro Messenger

Present day bicycling isn't what it used to be, and for that one can take the collective word of A. A. "Tony" Averitt, Owensboro repairman, and W. E. Danhauer and John Friedman, Frederica street druggists, who should know if anyone does.

They are among the few of the cyclists of old those fellows who braved the heights to climb five feet or so in the air and mount the saddle of the big front wheel-little back wheel bicycles of more than a half century ago – who remain.

Their memories of the days when bicycles were not quite as numerous as they are at present were refreshed with the sight of one of the old picture book two-wheelers that had been taken to

Averitt's shop for repairs by its owner who resides at Elizabethtown, but whose name the repairman does not know.

Early Bicycles Expensive

They remembered that those bicycles they first rode as young men were really expensive when their price was compared with that of the present day bike. The old bicycles sold for \$150 new, whereas the greatly improved contraptions of today, before their sale was banned, brought between \$25 and \$50.

They remember that when the rider of one of those old timers started to fall there was nothing he could do about it except just go ahead and fall and be thrown several feet in the process. They know that with the bicycles in use now it is seldom necessary to fall completely because the seat is near enough to the ground that the rider can put out one foot and catch himself before it is too late.

They remember other things, too, but they come later.

In repairing the old bicycle. Averitt felt perfectly at home, for he was merely repeating (only about fifty-five years later) what he had done before. In his early days he built three such bicycles – one of them with a buggy wheel for the front and a baby buggy wheel for the back. His latest job was a little simpler than that. All he had to do this time was rig up a new saddle; patterned after the type originally on it, put tires on the wheels, put a few spokes in the wheels, and put on new pedals.



The sight- of a bicycle was nothing new to Misses Sally Boone and Jean Smith, but the sight of a bicycle such as one at "Tony" Averitt's shop was, so Miss Boone climbed onto the saddle to get an idea of how Owensboro cyclists of a half century and more ago rode, while Averitt told her and Miss Smith about it.

Difference Now And Then

These present day bicyclists who have smooth (in most instances) and hard surfaced streets over which to ride cannot appreciate the difference in their riding and that of Averitt, Danhauer, and Friedman, for when they started riding streets were of dirt – dusty in dry weather and muddy in wet – and there is all the difference in the world in pedaling on a smooth surface and in either dust or mud.

Owensboroans did not take to bicycles readily. They were skeptical about their ability to learn to ride them, and sales were ordinarily made on the premise that the dealer teach the purchaser to ride.

Despite the public's doubt, the number of the old style bikes increased and within a few years after Averitt made the first here, many Owensboroans rode them. Then Averitt, Danhauer and Friedman, along with Frank Guenther, Albert Guenther, John Whitehead. "Bannie" Clark, Marc Stuart, John T. Higdon, and George Unser whose names are familiar to the older persons still here formed an Owensboro Bicycle club, rigged themselves up in uniforms, and had what to them was just as big a time as do the present day cyclists who fill the streets in groups.

There was quite an art to riding those first bicycles and if the rider was not proficient he soon learned he would be thrown, "and thrown hard." Those early bikes were what might almost be called vicious, for after throwing the rider the back wheel had a habit of spinning through the air, inscribing an arc of 180 degrees, and coming down on the head of the unsuspecting rider with a bang.

Present Type Has 'Safety'

Averitt did not use his bicycle for his pleasure only, but also used it for the pleasure of others by performing on it as a trick rider at skating rinks including one he and Friedman operated over the W. H. Miller livery stable, in the location of the present J. C. Penney Co., store, and other rinks in Henderson, Rockport, Ind., and Evansville, Indiana.

One of his favorites was to balance two straight chairs, holding one upright in each hand, while pedaling along with only one foot. Another was to place a ladder horizontally across a box and ride up one side and down the other, keeping his balance while the wheels bumpety- bumped on and off the rungs.

With the advent of the present type bike, known at its inception as the "safety" bicycle because its height did not make it as dangerous as the old type, cycling boomed. Even with the development of the safety, though many of the refinements of the present one were absent. Most noticeable was failure to carry the coaster brake of the present bike, which enables the rider to keep his feet on the pedals and coast at the same time. With the first safeties it was necessary to remove the feet from the pedals if any coasting was to be done. The coaster brake did not come for several years, and Averitt recalls that Henry Parrish, Owensboro insurance agent, had the first one here.

What Next?

The bicycle is not as new a thing as some might think. As a means of transportation it is much older than the one with the big front wheel and small back wheel. In fact, it was shortly after the close of the great Continental war in 1815 that the first bicycle was introduced into England and France.

It was at the best an awkward affair, composed of two heavy wooden wheels of equal diameter and connected by a longitudinal bar. The mode of locomotion was pushing the feet against the ground, much as it done with a child's scooter of today.

That such a cumbersome method of locomotion soon died a natural death is not to be wondered at, and for the next fifty years little progress was made as various kinds of levers and other attempted appliances were found too intricate.

In 1869 a Parisian conceived the idea of making the front wheel much larger than the rear wheel and from that grew the present bicycle. Not all of the bicycles of that type were the same size, the large wheels varying from three feet to five feet in diameter, to suit the length of the legs of the rider. Now, with bicycles developed to their present apparent state of perfection, those old timers who remember the days back when, wonder what, if anything, will be the next improvement.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 12 November 1944, p.4A:

Anthony Averitt, of Owensboro, has been declared duplicate first prize winner in a craft contest conducted by Popular Science Monthly magazine and has been awarded \$25. Mr. Avritt's entry was a round wood carving of an old fashioned high bicycle. Together with the check, Mr. Avritt received a commendatory letter from the magazine informing him that to be a duplicate winner was a great honor. A picture of the prize winning carvings will appear in the February issue of Popular Science.



**Popular Science Monthly, Vol. 146, No. 2, February 1945
(New York, NY: Popular Science Publishing Co., Inc.) p.156:**



Special-prize winner A. A. Avritt's entry was this nostalgic replica of an old-fashioned big-wheeler. Dowels were used for everything except the wheel rims, which were turned from a piece of flat stock



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 3 September 1950, p.9A:

A. Avritt

Andy A. Avritt, former resident of Owensboro, died at the home of his niece, Mrs. James Rosson, at Bellville, Ill., according to word received by Mrs. Willis Whoerey, 1212 Cedar street, Saturday. Mr. Avritt for many years owned and operated a bicycle and repair shop in the 300 block West Fourth, street. He had resided here most of his life, and following the death of his wife about two years ago he left Owensboro to make his home with his niece. He had been in failing health for sometime.

Surviving are one sister, Mrs. Mark Walker, Terre Haute, Ind., and several nieces and nephews. The body will be brought to the Owensboro Funeral home, 734 Frederica street, Monday.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 6 September 1950, p.4:

A. A. Avritt

The body of Andy A. Avritt, former resident of Owensboro, who died at the home of his niece, Mrs. James Rosson, in Bellville, 111., Saturday, was brought to the Owensboro Funeral home Monday.

Services were held at 2 p. m. Tuesday from the Owensboro Funeral home, the Rev. H. K. Kuhnle, pastor of Third Baptist church, officiating. Burial was in Rose Hill cemetery. Pallbearers: Charley Bauman, D. K. Hagan, Willis Whobrey, John Wood, Charles Southworth and Gilbert Hagerman.



Gravestone at Rose Hill Cemetery in Owensboro, KY



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Saturday 1 December 1973, p.1B:



Namesake

A PICTURE of Col. Joseph Daviess, the man for whom Daviess County was named, has been donated to the Owensboro-Daviess County Library by Henry Wilson, right. Preparing to hang the portrait in the library's Kentucky room is Mrs. Alice Gene Lewis, librarian. The library is celebrating its fifth anniversary at 450 Griffith Ave. (Staff photo by Steve Bickwermer)

Grandfather clock built by Anthony A. Averitt is in the center. In 2024 the clock is still on display in the Kentucky Room at the Daviess County Public Library, 2020 Frederica Street, Owensboro, KY.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 28 July 2002, p.1C & 3C:

Local librarians handle treasures from across state

By Dylan Sullivan, Messenger-Inquirer

She only gets paid for one job, but Shelia Heflin really has three.

The Daviess County Public Library's information services manager is in charge of the Kentucky Room and functions as a librarian, archivist and curator.

Heflin said the room is a "treasure trove," and it's home to objects one would not normally expect to find in a library.

One is a scale model of a trolley from the long-defunct Owensboro system.

"It was built by Bill Mattingly and Jim Eaton," she said. "Everything is to scale."

The model is indeed impressive. Even the complex undercarriage of the trolley is rendered in shiny metal.

But why isn't this model in a museum?

"Because they donated it to us," she said.

And Heflin has tried to create a mutually beneficial relationship with area museums since she arrived at the library 23 years ago. Several pieces of donated artwork are on "indefinite loan" to the Owensboro Museum of Fine Art.

The Kentucky Room is also home to a large wooden clock, built by Owensboro handyman A.A. Averitt in 1898. It's about 4 feet tall and is much more wood than watch.

Until a few years ago, it was still ticking. But the person responsible for its repair left Owensboro.

The clock and trolley are kept on display, but other items are kept in a back room.

One such item is an ashtray from the once-famous Owensboro Ditcher and Grader Company, whose products were used throughout the nation.

"We've had people from out West restoring these and wanting to know more about the company," Heflin said. For these purposes, she keeps files on Owensboro businesses. She also has information on the Green River Distillery Company, makers of "The whiskey without regrets."

She has a number of tokens featuring the company's advertising symbol, a smiling black man standing side by side with a mule carrying a jug of whiskey.

"They had an incredible number of items they would give out to advertise their product," she said.

She got the tokens from someone who was doing research on the distillery. After his project was done, he sent her the tokens as a thank-you gift.

The Kentucky Room is also home to volumes of genealogical material, and prints of old Owensboro buildings line the walls.

For the genealogical material, Heflin has a clear organizational system. But for objects such as the trolley and tokens, inventory control is handled more through mental means than by physical card catalogs.

"I know where everything is," she said.

Heflin said she has had to refuse some items would-be donators tried to pass on to the library.

"There have been things I have referred to area museums," she said. "One man contacted the Kentucky Historical Society to give away all his silver pieces."

Heflin said there is little competition between the library and other possible repositories of historical objects.

"Things do need to be preserved," she said.

Kentucky Wesleyan College's library does not get offered items as often as the public library, but one collection of items does stand out.

"They came from the Winchester campus," said Julie Gilmore, technical services librarian, gesturing to a set of Stone Age implements protected in a glass case. "So they're not illegally dug as far as I know."

KWC moved from Winchester to Owensboro 51 years ago.

The collection contains stone marbles, axes, mortar and pestle sets and even drug paraphernalia in the form of stone pipes.

"They probably were using drugs of some kind," Gilmore said.

The glass case, in the rear of the library, also contains a basket and a hat, which look remarkably similar.

"I don't know why someone thinks that's a hat and not a basket; I don't know why someone thinks this was a basket and not a hat," Gilmore said, pointing to the brown and yellow woven objects.

Other than the fact that they were once housed in Winchester, little more is known about the implements. And the case has become a running joke among the college's librarians.

"We don't know where they came from or why they're here," Gilmore said.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 11 September 2005, pp.1A & 2A:

A century of crashes: Centennial of city's first accident this week

City averaged 7.86 crashes a day in 2004

By Keith Lawrence, Messenger-Inquirer

Anthony A. "Tony" Averitt was heading south on Frederica Street on the afternoon of Sept. 14, 1905.

He didn't know it then, but he was about to roll - or crash - into history.

Averitt was one of Owensboro's first auto builders.

The Owensboro Buggy Co. had tried its hand at building one of the new automobiles that were beginning to show up in town.

But the drive chain wouldn't stay on.

So, Averitt and F.X. Poindexter bought the vehicle for \$150 and rebuilt it.

That was cheap.

In July 1900, banker James H. Parrish bought the city's first automobile, a Waverly, for \$1,250.

But it apparently ran well.

Soon, Averitt and Poindexter had their car driving at speeds of up to 35 mph.

That was very fast for the times.

On July 7, 1905, the City Commission passed Owensboro's first traffic laws.

The speed limit was set at 12 mph in most areas, 8 mph downtown and 4 mph at intersections.

Stop signs hadn't yet been invented.

According to newspaper accounts at the time, Averitt was driving along Frederica "at a good rate of speed" when a small dog belonging to Gunther Petrie gave chase.

The dog, which must have been fast, got its nose tangled in the spinning spokes of the wheel.

Averitt hit the brakes. The car hit the street car tracks in the middle of the street and was thrown against the curb.

That was Owensboro's first reported auto accident.

An axle was broken. A wheel was smashed. "And the machine (was) otherwise damaged," news accounts say.

Averitt apparently became Owensboro's first auto repairman that day, because news stories say he took the car to his shop to fix it.

The dog, by the way, walked away with little apparent damage, news stories say.

A century later, the Kentucky State Police say Daviess County saw 3,316 traffic accidents in 2004.

They included nine fatalities along with 664 wrecks with a total of 1,008 injuries and 2,643 with property damage.

Those were on public streets. Another 860 wrecks on private property included 29 accidents that resulted in 40 injuries.

Most involved other vehicles.

But statewide, the KSP report says, 2,981 wrecks involved deer and 1,541 involved other animals including dogs. Spokesmen for the Owensboro Police Department and Daviess County Sheriff's Department say the main causes of traffic accidents today are still what likely caused Averitt's wreck a century ago – speed and driver inattention.

"Drunken driving and impaired driving play roles in a lot of accidents," said Capt. David Osborne, chief deputy with the Daviess County Sheriff's Department. "But speed and driver inattention are the main reasons."

People, he said, "tend to drive 8 to 10 mph over the posted speed limit. Just that much extra speed makes a huge difference in reaction time."

Officer Doug Esther, spokesman for the city police department, said Owensboro averaged 7.86 traffic accidents a day in 2004. The most dangerous time to be driving in Owensboro, he said, is between 4 and 6 p.m. on Friday. That's when the most accidents occur.

Averitt's wreck was on a Thursday.

The most dangerous hours of any day, Esther said, are between 2 and 4 p.m.

That's likely when Averitt had his wreck.

The place you're most likely to have a wreck?

The Wal-Mart parking lot on Frederica Street, Esther said.

The second most likely?

The Wal-Mart parking lot on Kentucky 54. And that store has only been open since May.

The most dangerous intersection, Esther said, is Frederica Street and Time Drive, near Pizza Hut and across from Big Lots.

Six of the 10 worst intersections for wrecks are on Frederica Street, said Keith Harpole, traffic planner for the Green River Area Development District.

And the Fifth and Frederica area, where Averitt crashed, still ranks No. 15 on the list of accident sites, he said.

There were 14 wrecks there last year.

Police agencies don't calculate the economic damage caused by traffic accidents.

But the National Safety Council uses a formula that puts the economic loss of a traffic fatality at an average of \$1.12 million, an injury accident at \$18,000 and property damage at \$8,200.

Using those estimates, the 2004 wrecks cost Daviess Countians nearly \$50 million – \$10.08 million for deaths, \$18.14 million for injuries and \$21.7 million in property damage.



See also "Averitt Family Record" in family section on the website, [West-Central Kentucky History & Genealogy](#), by Jerry Long.