

HISTORY NOTES

Jones County History & Heritage, Inc.

Volume 5

Spring 2008

About the Newsletter

This is newsletter #6 in the series on historic communities of Jones County, Georgia, and it is the second issue concerning Gray, the county seat since 1905. The subject is commerce in Gray from about 1920 to 1960. The next issue will cover Gray's infrastructure.

Many thanks to the former and current residents of Gray who shared their remembrances and so patiently answered the numerous and sometimes repetitive questions. If there are errors and omissions, the editor welcomes corrections!

Special thanks to Margaret Souther Briscoe, whose childhood home stood in the heart of the downtown area. She was a treasure house of information with memories back to the 1920s, and great fun to be with.

P.S. Copies of this and previous newsletters on Gray (1886-1920), Round Oak, Caney Creek, Juliette, and Wayside are available for \$2 each at Kema's Bookstore, Atlanta Hwy, Gray GA.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 2 Junction, 129N/18S & East Clinton
- 3 West Clinton to Courthouse
- 3 West Clinton to Baptist Church
- 4 Newsletter Sources

Gray's Business District ca 1920 – 1960

During the 40 or more years covered in this newsletter, the business district was situated around the railroad tracks and stretched southwest to the courthouse. Over time, some businesses quickly rose and fell, but quite a few endured for several decades with changes of ownership and/or locations.

The old railroad depot, courthouse, and the original vault of the Bank of Gray (inside *The Jones County News* building, west end of the Atlanta Hwy strip) are probably the only remaining structures that predate the 1930s. There was a spurt of growth in the 1950s with a 65% increase in the population between 1950 and 1960 (866 to 1330), and that period is especially well represented in the buildings that remain, many of them brick.

The following is a partial list of businesses, with approximate dates in some cases. The exact locations are given if known.

Atlanta Hwy (Hwy 11) Strip

This area by the tracks was Gray's "Main Street," and it has been altered so much it is difficult to say what was where when. Early in Gray's history (probably in the late 1800s or early 1900s) in the late 1800s), oak trees were planted by the tracks to beautify, cool, and shade the area. George Wallace, Jr. remembers the spectacle of the huge flocks of starlings swirling into the big trees in the 1930s. They fell victim to progress when the road was widened in the early 1940s. It must have been a sad day when the sawing began!

For many decades, the anchor of downtown Gray was D. V. Childs' general merchandise store, a large two-story building of red brick with a corner entrance (south end of the strip, general area of the parking lot by *The Jones County News* office). Like Wal-Mart, it offered one-stop shopping—groceries, clothing, fabric, household items, hardware, farm implements, and Purina feed. Nolan P. Sammons ran the dry goods section, with Dr. J. D. Zachary's office above.

C. R. Smith constructed the building around 1905, and it was Bush & Smith General Mercantile before Mr. Childs bought it in 1915. On the second story were the Masonic Lodge, Claude Bryant's telephone exchange (followed by Ralph Lineburger's telephone company), and Joe Ben Jackson's law office. Mr. Jackson's son, Judge George Jackson also had a law office there at the beginning of his career. The building was demolished in 1971 to make way for a new Bank of Gray, also owned by the Childs family. Patsy and Frank Childs continued to operate

Childs' Department Store for a number of years in the former location of Mr. Childs' insurance agency on the strip. At this writing, an antique store and sandwich shop operated by Patsy Childs' daughter-in-law, Paige, has just opened in this area.

While the building was standing, Dolly Street, which now dead ends at Madison, continued by it to the business strip (Atlanta Hwy). In the 1920s, on the other side of Dolly St. (corner of W. Clinton and Madison) were Claude Bryant's store with an ice house in back, A.C. Kitchens' barber shop, and Charlie Greene's meat market.

In the 1930s, Sam Hungerford built a Gulf service station and drugstore on this corner (the present Emergency Management Services building with the mural on it). In 1951, Francis and Emily Farrar took over the drugstore and had variety items and a soda shop. By the 1940s, W. E. Knox owned the Gulf station, and eventually the fire department was located there. Mr. Knox was also the Gulf Oil distributor. His office was in a building on Dolly St. (demolished), across from the telephone company at 116 Dolly St. The oil tanks were between Madison and N. Jefferson.

Early on, to the north of Childs' store, were the Bank of Gray (established 1905), W. E. (Gene) Morgan's general store with coffins and a horse-drawn hearse in the back, and the post office. In 1927, Sam Butler, Sr. opened his auto garage at the north end of the block, behind the post office, according to a notice in *The Jones County News*. Dennis Greene's auto body shop was next door.

The Gray Hotel, built in 1910, stood into the 1940s behind the strip on the vacant lot to the left of 147 Madison St. In its latter years, Mrs. W.E. (Lovie) Morgan operated it as a boarding house and public dining room with the help of her sister, Queenie Huff. Many of Gray's young, single teachers and professional women boarded there, and were much in demand to play the piano and serve as hostesses at the Kiwanis Club dinners held at the hotel. Quite a few married Gray's eligible bachelors.

Joe T. Glawson had a shoe repair shop in the strip in the 1930s-40s. The Rural Electrical Association (REA) was organized in 1939, and its first office was in the strip (109 Atlanta Rd, site of Kema's Book Store). Later it moved to the outskirts of town on Hwy 22 (small frame building on the rise across from Jackson Brothers Repair Shop). The

Jones County History & Heritage, Inc.

(JCHH)

PO Box 2605

Gray GA 31032

JCHH is a private, non-profit organization formed in 2002 to promote an appreciation of Jones County's historic resources and foster their preservation, restoration, and revitalization.

Publications: 1) Newsletter series on historic communities of Jones County, \$2.00 each, Kema's Bookstore, Atlanta Hwy, Gray GA. 2) Carolyn White Williams' *History of Jones County, Georgia 1807-1907*, with a new index of names, \$75 (or \$80 if shipped). 3) Earl and Beth Colvin's *Fields of Stone: Cemeteries of Jones County, Georgia* and 4) *Butternut and Gray*, \$50 each (or \$55 if shipped). Send mail orders for books to the address above. Books also may be purchased at the Jones County Chamber of Commerce and Kema's Bookstore in Gray GA.

post office was to the left of the REA office (site of 107 Atlanta Rd, Wesley Music).

Mac and Pat Hungerford constructed several buildings in the strip in the 1940s as well as a tennis court and park with pecan trees near the north end of the block. They also built Lynka Skating Rink, named for daughters Lynn and Karen, on the outskirts of town on Hwy 129 just north of Northfork Ct. (site of Mid-Georgia Propane Gas office).

In 1943, the Gray Theatre, a Martin & Thompson Theatre, opened on Christmas Day in the former site of R. A. Lowe's bowling alley. James Balkcom operated the theatre into the 1960s.

In the 1950s to 1960s, W. E. Knox and Frank Childs had insurance agencies and were partners at one time. Jesse and Helen Glawson had a dry cleaner, which they sold to Zane Greene and his mother. Zane and his wife Anne operated it as Alert Cleaners in the 1960s, and later sold it to Sara and Jack Godard. In the late 1940s/early 1950s, Alvah and Estelle Greene operated The Snack Shack. Herald Henderson and Joe Ben Jackson had the Gray Trading Company (clothing and household good). Between these businesses was Mary Altman's beauty parlor. John Childs built his supermarket in

1952 (111 Atlanta Rd., present tenant is Curves).

By the 1940s, the office of Dr. J. D. Zachary, who practiced medicine from 1911 into the 1950s, was on the corner of M.L. King, Jr. Blvd. (115 Atlanta Rd, site of The Meat Shop). Dr. Zachary estimated that he delivered over 2,000 babies in Jones County during his career. The office was surrounded by trees, with a park to the side. His home was around the corner at 110 MLK, Jr. Blvd, and before that, in the 1920s, he lived in the house across the street on the corner of Madison St.

Junction of Hwy 129N/18S and E. Clinton St.

On the northeast corner of East Clinton St. and Hwy 129N (site of The Crossing) was the City Service Station, which opened in 1935. Cecil Roberts ran it for a time. Later, it became the Power Oil Station. In the late 1940s, Mr. Roberts built and ran a grocery store on 129N beside the service station (red brick building, currently a beauty parlor). Grady Blasingame bought the business in 1959, and operated it in the 1960s.

The first business on the southeast corner (present retail building adjacent to the Gray Motel) was Luther Morton's two-story frame building (probably a general store), built in the early 1900s. His lumber yard stood behind it on 18S. In the 1920s, Charlie Bowen had an auto garage in the building. Dances were held there on Saturday nights, and at one time, the family lived on the second floor. Another tenant was Bryant's store.

By the early 1940s, a Sinclair station stood on this site. Louise and Lewis Ethridge ran a café to the side of the station, followed by Cecil Robert's meat market. Emmett Bragg ran the service station around 1942-43, and Fred Greene ran it later. The service station was replaced with Charles Washburn, Jr.'s. and Mr. Willingham's Gray Lumber & Supply.

In 1951-52, Mr. Washburn built the "ultra-modern" Gray Motel and a restaurant on the site. The restaurant, operated by the R.E. O'Neals, was called *Flagalina*, derived from the crossroads destinations: Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas. Later the name was changed to the Townhouse.

South of the corner, on Hwy 18S, there had been a cotton gin and warehouse in the early to mid 1900s. In the late 1940s/early 1950s, several buildings were constructed in this vicinity. Gray's first city hall building was donated by Charlie Washburn, Jr. and moved from his lumber yard on

the outskirts of Gray (east on Hwy 22, on the left side across from several businesses). It had been his 3-room office. After it was moved, it was veneered with brick from a demolished service station. The building has been incorporated into the present City Hall complex that was constructed in the 1970s.

In the 1940s or early 1950s, Dennis Greene moved his auto repair business from the downtown strip to the concrete block building south of City Hall. South of that, Herbert Greene opened a meat processing and freezer locker business in the 1940s. Later Jim Carpenter took it over.

West Clinton St. to Courthouse

Gray Feed, Seed, and Fertilizer (beside the depot building on Railroad St.) was established by Milton Bowen about 1948 and by 1952/53, Howard and Floyd Childs had taken over the business. Howard's son, Ponder, is the present owner.

In the early 1940s into the 1960s, Milton Greene supplied the county with coal that heated some of the older houses. The train would drop the coal by the feed store for loading into the delivery truck.

Across from the depot (site of 120 W. Clinton St), JoJo Greene established a Standard station in 1947, which he ran until 1952. Alvah Greene (his father) and Jack Greene (his brother) were Standard Oil distributors from the early 1940s -1980s. The tanks were behind that station (present school bus lot on Ross St.).

Next door (left side of 115 W. Clinton St, site of Ready Mix USA office), was Horace Greene's Shell station, which Horace Harrell later ran as an Amoco station.

Adjacent to this station (right side of 115 W Clinton St, site of Ready Mix USA office) was Mark Greene's house, which by the 1950s had become Judge George Leonard Jackson's law office. Mark Greene began publishing *The Jones County News* in 1895, and the *News* office was behind the house at least through the 1950s, and after that it was a legal office. Mr. Greene's daughters, Vera and Etta (referred to in one breath as "Vera 'n' Ett) had begun publishing the paper by 1928. Later, Walter Toulson was the publisher.

By 1950, the brick strip of storefronts west of 115 W. Clinton St. had been built. Clayton Kitchens' barbershop was the first occupant, and the pole is still there on the far left. Mr. Kitchens was still in business until a few years ago. Jewett and

Nell Tucker opened the Gray Café in the middle, and the post office moved from the Atlanta Hwy strip into the far right space in 1951. Later, a new post office was built at 154 W. Clinton (site of Gray Police Station).

Farrar's variety store took over the space vacated by the Gray Café. Berta Morton remembers walking her elementary school class down to Farrar's to sample the wonders of the store. She would give each of them a nickel to spend, and they would walk out with sacks overflowing with far more than a nickel's worth, courtesy of Mrs. Farrar.

By the early 1950s, W.E. Knox had built the Gray Gulf Station west of the brick strip. Later Bill Davis owned it, and Alfred Ethridge operated it into the early 1970s. Mr. Davis opened his CPA office in 1960 in the present building on the corner of Dolly and Madison streets. This building, built by the Hungerfords, was originally divided into apartments. Mr. Davis also was the publisher of *The Jones County News* until the early 1980s.

The original tenant on the corner next to the station (site of 127 W. Clinton St.) was Will Mulligan's grocery store, which had been in business by the 1920s. George Wallace remembers it from his childhood in the 1930s as being a dark, windowless, and mysterious place with a corner entrance that you stepped down into (because of the raising of the highway). Harris and Emmett Bragg opened Bragg Appliance on this site in 1952. Gus Butler, Jr.'s garage was behind it on Ross St. (still called Butler's garage).

West Clinton St to Baptist Church

Henry and Lena Souther's house stood on the west corner of W. Clinton and Madison St. from as early as the 1920s into the 1970s. Frances Allen, one of the Souther daughters, had a beauty shop in it for many years before it was demolished.

Proceeding west, the present brick storefronts were built in the early 1950s. Cecil Powell, a pharmacist, opened Powell Drug Store in the far right corner of this strip in 1952. Folds Restaurant was beside it in the 1950s and early 1960s, and in the 1960s, Dr. Marcus Stewart had an office in this strip.

In the general vicinity, Callan Mulligan ran the bus station and a Texaco station in the 1940s (buildings were demolished). Milton Greene opened Gray Electric & Service in the early 1950s in a building (later burned) in the area of the present

Gray Dry Cleaners (120-B W. Clinton St.). He sold appliances and TVs, repaired appliances, and had gas pumps (building burned). Harris and Emmett Bragg (Bragg Appliance) got their start there. Later JoJo Greene had a Standard station in the building at 120-B W. Clinton.

The small brick building to the left of 120-B W. Clinton St. was Dr. H. B. Jones, Jr.'s medical office from 1955 until his retirement (probably 1980s).

In the very early 1900s, W.E. Morgan's General Merchandise stood on the corner across from the Baptist Church (site of 126 W. Clinton St.), and Henry Ethridge had a blacksmith shop on Dolly Street behind the Baptist Church. Henry Morgan operated the store later.

Dottie and Jerry Walker operated Gray Drug Company in the present building on the corner from about the 1970s until the new Gray Drug was built on the Hwy 18 bypass.

And last but not least, Miriam's Flower Shop opened in 1959 on Stewart Avenue. Miriam Ethridge and her husband Cecil operated it into the late 1900s. Mrs. Ethridge was a very skillful and talented florist who produced countless decorating schemes and arrangements during her long career.

Whereabouts Unknown

Several auto dealers advertised in the 1920s-30s: Gray Motor Company, Barron Motor Company, and Chambliss Motor Company, which later became

Newsletter Sources

Thanks to the following for their contributions to this newsletter: *Bobby Bentley, Emmett Bragg, Margaret Briscoe, Elaine Childs, Marguerite Childs, Patsy Childs, Ponder Childs, Kema Clark, Max Davis, Cecil Ethridge, Charles Farrar, Alice Golson, Anne Greene, Danny Greene, Lynn Nelson, Jamie Lewandowski, Harriet Madison, Berta Morton, Beebe Parker, Janice Roberts, Jimmy Roberts, Myra Sammons, Marilyn Sauls, George Wallace, Sally Wicker.*

References

Colvin, Earl and Beth. *Fields of Stone: Cemeteries of Jones County, Georgia*, Milledgeville GA. 2004.
The Jones County News, back issues 1920-1970
The Jones County News, Generations of History, Vols I and II
Williams, Carolyn White. *History of Jones County Georgia*. Macon GA, 1957.