

# The Business Life of Yates City



To find anyone now living, who was here one hundred years ago and who might therefore be able to give me the names of those who started the business life of Yates City, is self evident as an impossible task. I have, moreover, been unable to find any record of who they were. Therefore, I have found it necessary to begin this history at a time within the memory of those who are still living and were born in or near here, and who have been able to render me such assistance. I am deeply indebted to Mrs. Jennie Bliss, now deceased, Mrs. Ella Broadfield, Mrs. Etha C. Hensley, who is now living in California, Mr. Edwin Ekstrand of Elmwood, Illinois, Miss Adah North, her brothers, Earl and Ralph, Mr. Joe Clark, whose memory is exceptionally good for a man of his age, and Mr. Maro S. Corey, whose grandparents came here in 1857, the year the village was platted, all of whom have been very kind and generous in recounting to me as much as they could recall of the early facts up and down the business streets of the village. I have found that the statements they have made coincide very well with my own memory, which, though it does not go as far back as some of those named, does reach back to 1877 when my father moved to Yates City.

A history of Knox County, published in 1886, tells us that the first business building erected in Yates City was located on the corner of Main and Union streets in 1857, the same year the village was platted. A still later history states that it was on the southeast corner. This would place it on the corner where now stands the two story brick building occupied by the Bank of Yates City in the lower story and the American Legion in the second story. However, the building now standing there is not the original building. It was preceded by a frame building, which was occupied, at one time, as a grocery store operated by R. F. Anderson, the father of Mrs. Jennie Bliss. This building was destroyed by fire, and the present building was erected by James H. Nicholson in 1871. Mr. Anderson occupied this building and conducted a grocery store in partnership with his brother-in-law, Edmund Rogers. He used the front room only, because the rear room was occupied as a bank.

While the business of the village started on the southeast corner of Main and Union Streets, a considerable amount of the early business was

carried on along the street one block south of Main Street, which was named Market Street. This street was nearer the depot, which stood at that time at the east end of the "Y". That, I suppose, accounts for the business life being on that street.

On the northeast corner of South Union and Market Streets, someone built a two story frame building facing the south and extending back north to within about twenty five feet of the alley running east and west in that block. I do not know who built it, but my memory seems to tell me that it was once used as a grocery store; later, as a saloon, and still later as the printing shop of A. H. McKeighan, who published the Industrial Banner, which was later the Yates City Banner. A saloon owned by Mr. Eggert was the next business conducted in this building, and it finally burned along with the two story frame building that stood in the rear of it and faced west on South Union street along the south edge of the alley.

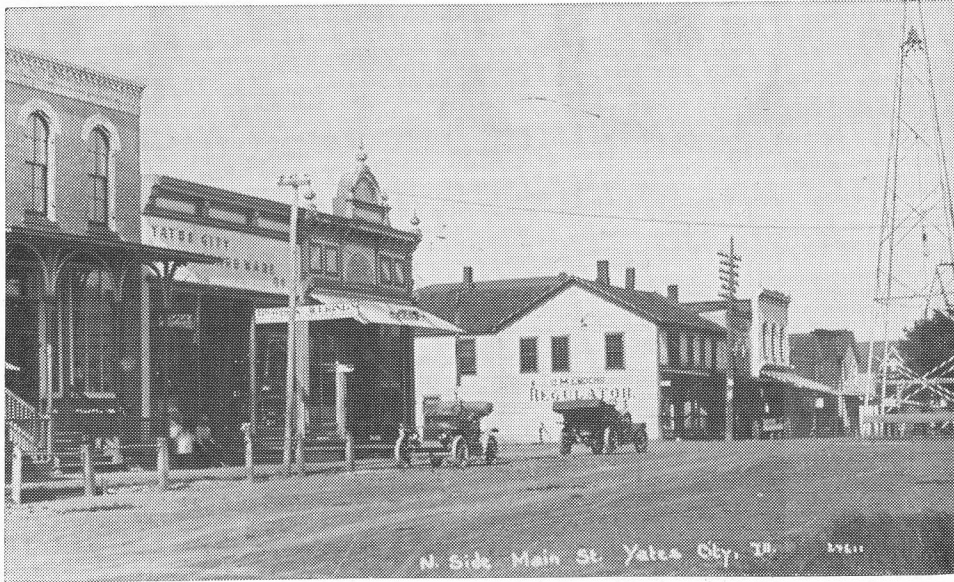
A new block building, now owned by Claude Johann has since been erected where the first mentioned building stood. The lower story is used as a tavern and the second story as the family residence.

The second building mentioned was a drug store operated by Steve Boyer, who lived upstairs, and, later on, it was occupied by Dr. Royce as an office. Finally it became a saloon operated by Isom Dalton, during whose occupancy it burned, as previously mentioned.

There were about six feet between the two buildings, above mentioned, in which there was a stairway leading to the second story of each. The upper story of the south building was, for many years, the public hall in which public entertainments, dances, shows, and various other gatherings of a public nature were held.

The next building east of Union Street on the north side of Market street, was the village hall in which the village trustees held their meetings. It was also used for the village and township elections, and it was allowed to be used by the public for various purposes.

Still on east was a livery stable built, if I am correct, by J. B. Coykendall. When that business began to decline, he turned it into a



MAIN STREET FIFTY YEARS AGO

poultry buying and packing establishment, but it was finally dismantled and the material used for other purposes.

Also farther east was the blacksmith shop of Alec Kernes, one of the early settlers, which he operated for many years.

On the northeast corner of Market and Burson streets was the wagon shop of W. D. Aley, which he built in 1880. Many wagons were built and sold to the farmers around the community. This building burned in later years.

Going west on Market Street from Union Street, there was located a large building which was used for hotel purposes for many years. As far back as I can recall, it was operated by John Hunter, but I am informed that it had been used for that purpose previously by others than John Hunter. After Mr. Hunter died, it was occupied as a saloon, operated by Lem Serles and Dick Driscoll, and eventually was purchased by William W. Bantz. He moved it to its present location east of the Presbyterian Church, and remodeled it into a dwelling house. He and his family occupied it as their home and it is at this time occupied by his son, C. S. Bantz.

Another hotel was operated by A. J. Kightlinger. It was in the building that still stands as the first house south of the railroad on the west side of Burson Street. His business lost out when the depot was moved to the west end of the "Y", but Mr. Kightlinger had the urge to continue, so he made the necessary financial arrangements, and built the two story brick building now belonging to Mrs. Mae Hitchcock. He continued in that business until he rented it to Charles Kerr, who, with his wife, operated the hotel for a while. Mr. and Mrs. Peter

Norton were the next to follow up this business. In due time, the building came into the possession of Mrs. Lulu Bowman, who sold it to David Mathews. He operated it as an apartment building until he sold it to Mrs. Mae Hitchcock, who is still continuing in the same business.

In the first house west of the Phillips 66 service station on the south side of East Main Street, C. L. Roberts operated the Commercial Hotel for several years during the 1890's, while the depot stood in the east end of the "Y". However, poor health forced him to discontinue.

On the south side of Market Street and on the west side of Union Street next to the railroad stood two elevators, which did a large amount of business in the early days. Williamsfield was not in existence at that time; so much grain was hauled from all over Elba Township, as well as from Salem Township, to these elevators. It was not an uncommon sight to see wagons loaded with corn, wheat, or oats, backed up for a block or more, waiting to unload into the elevator.

Hogs and cattle were brought to the village to be shipped to the city markets. If the farmer lived near enough, he often drove them in instead of hauling them, as it took a lot of wagons to haul very many of each. In those days, most of the hogs were not marketed until they weighed four or five hundred pounds. Bass Bevins and C. L. Wing operated the elevators for many years, followed by: Wm. J. Wells, the Knox brothers, C. M. Corbin, O. B. West, and W. E. West, and perhaps some others in the early days who are not familiar to me.