

**Walks through History
Murfreesboro Courthouse Square**

Begin at the Pike County Archives & History Society, 112 N. Washington, Suite B

November 15, 2014

By: Rachel Silva



Intro

Good morning, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Welcome to the “Walks through History” tour of the Murfreesboro Courthouse Square. I’d like to thank the Pike County Archives & History Society for co-sponsoring the tour, and I’d especially like to recognize Darlene Watson for her help. Thank you so much!

For any architects in the audience, this tour is worth two hours of HSW continuing education credit through the American Institute of Architects. See me after the tour if you’re interested.

Downtown Murfreesboro contains three buildings listed in the National Register of Historic Places—the Pike County Courthouse (NR-listed 1986), Conway Hotel (NR-listed 1986), and Murfreesboro Cities Service Station (NR-listed 2003).

Brief History of Murfreesboro

Pike County was established in 1833 by Arkansas’s territorial legislature. The county was named for explorer Zebulon Montgomery Pike, who in 1806 discovered Pikes Peak in Colorado. The Pike County seat was located at a town

called Zebulon, obviously another reference to the famed explorer. In 1836, when Arkansas became a state, the town changed its name to Murfreesborough (Murfreesboro), and a log courthouse was built near the center of the present-day town square. Local legend holds that many early settlers had migrated from the area around Murfreesboro, Tennessee, explaining the town's name change from Zebulon to Murfreesboro.

Located near the Little Missouri River, Murfreesboro's rich soil was ideal for growing cotton, corn, and other crops. The timber industry was important as well. Murfreesboro was the longtime home of the Anthony Lumber Company, which became one of the leading sawmills in the South.

The area around Murfreesboro is one of great geological diversity. In addition to diamonds, the region contains several other gems and minerals. About 100 million years ago, the coast of the Gulf of Mexico ran across modern-day Pike County. A volcanic eruption brought diamonds and rocks from deep within the earth's mantle to the surface. In 1906 John Wesley Huddleston found the first diamonds near Murfreesboro, starting a diamond rush in Pike County. Within a few years of Huddleston's discovery, the land on top of the Prairie Creek Pipe, the ancient volcanic vent where Huddleston found his diamonds, was owned by two rival mining companies. The area never yielded enough diamonds to be profitable for a commercial mining operation, but news of the diamond discovery spurred economic and population growth in the county seat. In 1952 the owners of the mining companies formed a partnership and opened the area to the public as a tourist attraction, where people could hunt for diamonds and keep what they found. The Crater of Diamonds, as it was called, was purchased by the State of Arkansas in 1972 and became Crater of Diamonds State Park, the world's only diamond-producing site open to the public. The park is about two miles southeast of the Murfreesboro square and hosts thousands of visitors each year.

Pike County landowner and railroad man Martin Greeson, who was actually from Prescott, began campaigning in 1900 for the construction of a dam on the Little Missouri River to alleviate seasonal flooding. Although Congress approved the

project in 1941, construction on Narrows Dam did not begin until June 1, 1948. The dam was completed on July 12, 1951, and created Lake Greeson, named in honor of Martin Greeson. Lake Greeson is about five miles north of Murfreesboro and is a tourist destination for boating, fishing, and hunting. Daisy State Park is located at the north end of the lake.

Weyerhaeuser bought the Anthony Sawmill in 1977 and closed it in 1982, eliminating Murfreesboro's largest industry. Today, employers in Murfreesboro include the Tyson Foods hatchery, Ward Shavings (wood chip mill), South Pike County School District, and Diamond City Trailer Manufacturing (boat trailers). The 2010 Census listed the population of Murfreesboro at just over 1,600.

Individual Properties

112 N. Washington, Pike County Annex Building/Pike County Archives & History Society—

The current building was constructed about 1963 on the site of the 2-story Owens Building, which was built about 1912. The Owens Building, likely built by brothers Owen B. Owens and John Owens, housed the Farmers and Merchants Bank in its eastern (corner) storefront, a haberdashery (men's clothing and sewing supplies) in the western storefront, and the telephone exchange and professional offices upstairs. The building later housed Grady H. Ward's Garage (1936-47) and Jackson's Café on the first floor and the telephone exchange (owned by L. M. Lavender) and offices of John Owens, attorney, and Dr. Biggs, herb doctor, upstairs. The old bank vault was still in the building during the time that Ward's Garage was there, and mercury from the cinnabar mines was stored in it. Cinnabar, the principal ore of mercury, was discovered in Pike County in 1930 and was mined from 1931 to 1944.

The Owens Building was demolished about 1963 by Roland Bryant to make way for the current parking lot and building, which housed his grocery store (Roland Bryant Food Market). It was later purchased by Ramond Walls and operated as Raymond's Food Market. The building was also home to the Pizza Shack, owned by Ken Harris, before becoming the Pike County Annex Building/Archives.

[PCAHS was formed in 1986 from the earlier Pike County Heritage Club. Records were kept at the library and municipal building until the current location was secured in 2002. PCAHS houses a variety of research materials, including county and census records, manuscripts, newspapers, maps, and photos.]

Cross to stand in front of the courthouse.

Pike County Courthouse (NR-listed 10/16/1986)—

The current Pike County Courthouse is the fourth courthouse on this site. The first courthouse was built in 1836 and was a log structure. The log building was destroyed by fire in 1855, and in 1856 a two-story, wood-frame building was constructed to replace it. In 1895 the wood-frame courthouse burned. A two-story, brick building was erected in 1897 and served as the courthouse until 1931, when it was demolished to make way for the current building.

The current courthouse was built in 1931-32 at the cost of \$45,600. The buff brick and cast-stone building was designed by the Texarkana architectural firm of Witt, Siebert, and Halsey in the Art Deco style. Art Deco characteristics include the building's boxy shape, smooth walls, and geometric details in the cast-stone trim. The county jail used to be on the third floor of the courthouse and was in use until the 1980s.

Walk to the west side of the courthouse and look northwest.

Tanning salon at northwest corner of square—

This building was constructed ca. 1935 as an Esso Service Station. It was built on the site of the old Owens-Kelley General Store. Olvy Johnson had a mechanic shop in the building in the early years before moving to another location. The Esso Station was known as "Charlie and W. T.'s Station" for many years, even after Charlie Barentine and W. T. Smedley sold it. It was also known as Jackson Station. The Terrell family bought the station and put in a sandwich counter called Jiffy Corner. There has been a pizza restaurant in the building twice, and it is now a tanning salon.

West Main Street

Look at building just south of West Main and continue moving southwest.

Cowling Title Company—

About 1939 a Sinclair Service Station was built on this site. It was run by Bass Johnson. By the mid-50s, it was a Lion Oil station. The 1939 building was replaced in 1967 by the current structure, which housed a Lion Oil station run by John Paul Cornish and later, Tom Woodley.

Cypress Creek Candle Company—

In the early 20th century (1913 Sanborn), there was an Air Dome theater on this site. An Air Dome was like a Drive-in, except you walked in and watched an outdoor show, usually hidden from the street by a fence. The current building was constructed ca. 1940 and housed the post office downstairs and a lodge hall and Dr. C. E. Dillard's dental office upstairs. Dr. Dillard had an earlier office above the Elzy Grocery on the southeast corner of the square (currently Caddo Antiques). This building is a good example of early 20th century commercial-style architecture, with minimal brick detailing, transom windows, and metal-frame casement windows upstairs.

Next building to south with gray doors and boarded storefront—

Built ca. 1938 and housed the Minlo Theater, which later became the Pike Theater. The theater is missing its marquee and ticket booth. The storefront and transom windows are boarded. The theater closed in the 1970s after a Drive-in opened at Nashville. This building has interesting basket-bond brickwork in the recessed panel, but you can't see it very well because the brick has been painted.

Ceba Gas—

Built ca. 1940 and has some nice brick details, but they are obscured by the paint (it's really a buff, red, and yellow brick building). If you look hard, you can see some horizontal bands on the building's upper façade, as well as the shaped parapet and the rectangular panel made with header bricks (as opposed to

“stretchers,” or bricks laid sideways). The building has metal-frame casement windows upstairs. This was home to Bobby and Sue Carroll’s Hardware & Appliance. Interestingly, there was an open alley at the southwest corner of the square until this building was constructed ca. 1940.

Gallery—

This building was constructed ca. 1965 to replace an older 1-story building that by 1929 housed Bascom and Charlie Carroll’s Auto Sales. The current structure was originally an open shed and was used by the Carrolls to store lumber and large items from the hardware store next door.

Weatherboard veneer building—

Early Sanborn maps (1913 & 1919) show an “ironclad” building on this site, likely wood-frame covered with corrugated metal. Although it is now covered with weatherboard, I think this building may date to the early 20th century. By the late 1920s, this was Henry Terrell’s Feed Store. Later, Terrell’s son, James Henry Terrell, had his general merchandise store here.

Walk south on S. Washington.

H. M. Ross/Lewis & Branch Building—

This building was constructed in the summer of 1909 by H. M. “Mac” Ross to house a hardware store and general merchandise store. The brick building, which was later stuccoed at the top of the front façade, featured two raised parapets with nameplates reading “H. M. Ross” and “Lewis & Branch.” The Ross nameplate remains, but Lewis & Branch is missing. The building retains its original cast-iron thresholds, storefront columns, pressed tin ceiling, and some of its original storefront with 4-pane transom windows. There is even an old metal ring on the concrete porch for tying up a wagon or horse. There used to be a gas pump in front of the building, but it was removed about 1941.

The northern storefront originally housed Lewis & Branch General Merchandise. The middle storefront was a warehouse for the hardware store, and the southern portion of the building (actually two storefronts wide) housed a branch of the

Prescott Hardware Company, which was headquartered in Prescott and owned by John Marshall Pittman. The name of the local hardware store soon changed to Murfreesboro Hardware, and in 1917 it was purchased by A. P. and Frank Terrell, who ran it until 1949, when Robert and Luella Terrell took over. Robert and Luella Terrell's son, Phil Terrell, has been managing the store since 1993. Robert Terrell died in 1996, and Luella Terrell, at the age of 91, still owns the store.

In more recent memory, the northern storefront was a pool hall, middle one was Alton Terrell's Auto Supply, and the southern one was Murfreesboro Hardware.

[Was H. M. "Mac" Ross the grandfather of politician Mike Ross?]

Current Murfreesboro Hardware Building—

Built in 1963 to serve as a new home for Murfreesboro Hardware. A 2-story house dating from the turn of the 20th century, which was later used as a hotel, was demolished to make way for the 1963 building.

Walk to west on Mauney Street. [Named after Millard Mauney, on whose property diamonds were also found?]

Metal and rock building—

Amvets

Concrete slab and foundation piers—

This was the site of the Memphis, Dallas & Gulf Railroad Depot. The board-and-batten depot was built about 1915 to the east of the railroad tracks, which ran north-south through town along present-day School Street.

The Memphis, Dallas & Gulf Railroad laid tracks through Murfreesboro beginning in May 1913. The rail line serviced lumber mills and logging camps in southwest Arkansas and also transported passengers. The MD&G began to have financial trouble even before World War I and, after the war, never had a chance to recover. The forests had been cut over, which reduced the amount of timber shipped out of the area. On August 15, 1922, the railroad was sold at public auction in Nashville. Former stockholders bought it, and it was reorganized as the Graysonia, Nashville & Ashdown Railroad.

By 1926, all rails running north from Murfreesboro were taken up, but the Murfreesboro-to-Nashville route continued, hauling pulpwood, lumber, and freight until 1952, when the line was sold and salvaged. The MD&G Depot later became a feed store and commodity storage facility before it was demolished about 1980.

Point to west across School Street—Murfreesboro Cemetery and 1982 Pike County Jail, which is now the 911 coordinator office.

Back to S. Washington, east side of street walking north.

Inkredible—

This was the most recent home of the Masonic Lodge, which has consolidated with Glenwood and moved there.

Orange brick buildings—

A blacksmith shop and Basham's Filling Station were located on this site in the early 20th century. The orange brick buildings were constructed ca. 1970 to serve as office space and now house the circuit chancery judge's office, rural water, Murfreesboro Diamond newspaper, flower shop, and the county extension office.

Cut through the orange brick buildings to see the Senior Center.

In the early 20th century, Filander Columbus "Flan" Stuart operated a livery stable on the current Senior Center site (Flan Stuart was Evorie Brock Ward's maternal grandfather). By the mid-20th century, Jackson's Cleaners and Roy O'Neal's Shoe Repair were located on the grassy lot north of the Senior Center.

Scuttle Hole—

There used to be a small opening (about 3 feet wide) at the southeast corner of the square where two buildings came close together but didn't touch. Students used to have open campus for lunch and would walk a few blocks up to the square to eat. Instead of walking around on S. Washington, they would cut

through the “scuttle hole” to buy a sandwich, chips, and a coke for lunch. In the 1970s, the eastern portion of the Buie Building (Hawkins Furniture) was remodeled to house a SWEPCO (Southwestern Electric Power Company) office. This closed the “scuttle hole.”

Walk back to square and talk about southeast corner.

Caddo Antiques—

Built ca. 1915, possibly by someone named Clevenger. It is referred to as the Clevenger Building, but the metal slipcover obscures the parapet and nameplate that are present in old photos. The second story of the building actually has 8 windows behind that slipcover. The building had two storefronts and a central stairway to access the second floor. Early first floor occupants included Carson & Jones General Merchandise (on west; right) and John W. Elzy’s City Grocery and Market (on east; left). By the 1920s, J. W. Elzy’s son, Paul Elzy, opened a dry goods store in the western storefront. The upstairs of the building housed professional offices and the Masonic Lodge Hall for Pike Lodge No. 91 F & AM (organized at Murfreesboro in 1855). Dr. C. E. Dillard had his dental office here before moving to the southwest corner of the square, and Dr. Alford was also upstairs in this building before moving to the back of Baber Drug.

H. T. Buie Building, 1914 (Hawkins Furniture Store)—

The H. T. Buie Building was constructed in 1914 (see name panel on upper façade) and was originally three bays wide. The easternmost bay was remodeled in the 1970s, which closed the “scuttle hole” I talked about earlier. The building features a raised parapet and nice brick detailing, including soldier courses (bricks standing up vertically like soldiers) and dentil work. When the building was first completed, it housed Charlie and Joe Green’s Store (dry goods?) in the western storefront (right), the post office (middle), and Jim Goodwin’s Café and Confectionery (eastern storefront). Aaron Hunt’s Dry Goods was at one time located in the eastern storefront. In the mid-20th century, the western storefront housed a grocery store (what was the name of it?). In recent memory, the historic part of the building housed Buel and Sarah Hawkins’s Furniture Store.

The 1970s portion was a SWEPCO office.

B-Savvy—

Built in the late 1940s and features a stepped parapet and interesting brick patterns on the upper façade. The storefront is recessed to accommodate several businesses. The storefront closest to the sidewalk (on north side) was Cleeb Chaney's Barber Shop. Other businesses in this building included Horace Cox's Restaurant and Beer Hall, Helen Ellis's Beauty Shop, and Farm Bureau.

Sara's Showroom—

The Hendrix Drug Store was located on this site until 1939, when it was destroyed by fire. A new building was constructed ca. 1940 and housed Shoetel's ("Shuttle's") Drug Store, which had delicious ham salad and pimento cheese sandwiches and cherry Coke. Dr. Duncan's office was located in the back of the drug store. The building was later an office for the Pike County Diamond newspaper.

Owens-Stelle Building (Hawkins Variety Store)—

This building was constructed in the summer of 1909, at the same time as the old Murfreesboro Hardware Building on S. Washington. The upper portion of the front façade is missing. It was originally taller and had two raised sections in the parapet with nameplates reading "Owens" and "Stelle." Stucco has also been applied to the upper portion of the façade. Except for these changes, the building is almost entirely original, with wooden bulkheads, cast-iron threshold, 4-pane transom windows, pressed tin ceiling, old skylight and mezzanine on the south side, etc.

The building was constructed by Owen B. Owens, Sr., in 1909 and housed Stell and Adams General Merchandise, run by S. B. Stell and Lloyd Adams, in the southern storefront (right) and Whitten Drug Store, run by Pomeroy Whitten, in the northern storefront (left). In the early 1940s, Watson Bros. Grocery was located in the southern storefront, followed in the 1960s by Jackson's Diamond City Department Store, run by Pete and Martha Jackson.

Pomeroy Whitten sold his drug store (north side of building) to Oscar Baber, a pharmacist from Gurdon, and it became Baber Drug. Not long after Mr. Baber moved to Murfreesboro, his wife died. He then married one of Dr. Alford's twin daughters, Mary Alford. When Dr. Alford got older, he moved his office to the back of his son-in-law's drug store because he didn't want to climb the stairs to his former office above Elzy's City Grocery (in the Caddo Antiques building). You can still see Dr. Alford's name painted on the door to his office. In 1943 the northern storefront became Hawkins Variety Store, run by Buel and Sarah Hawkins. Their slogan was "We have almost everything, if you can help us find it." DeWayne Gray purchased the building in 1999 and operates Southern Specialties Jewelry on the south side, and he has just recently reopened the Hawkins Variety Store on the north side.

Point to the east side of the courthouse—there was a water pump and trough on this side of the courthouse so people could water their horses.

Walk east on E. Main Street.

Municipal Building, 1972—

The Municipal Building was built in 1972 on the site of the old Conway House, which was built in 1886 by Dr. Joel H. Conway, Sr., and served as the only hotel in town. In June 1913 W. J. Lockeby of Murfreesboro began the construction of a hotel on the northeast corner of the square. His new hotel was purchased in the spring of 1914 by Joel H. Conway, Sr., and became known as the New Conway Hotel. The old Conway House on E. Main Street was later known as the Hammons Hotel (1919 Sanborn) and the Clark Hotel before it burned (mid-1920s?).

The whistle from the Anthony Sawmill is mounted in front of the Municipal Building. John William "Will" Anthony and his wife, Margaret Bass Anthony, moved to Murfreesboro in 1928 and opened the Anthony Lumber Company (was it really called the Murfreesboro Lumber Company and just referred to as the Anthony Sawmill?). The sawmill was Murfreesboro's largest employer and became one of the leading sawmills in the southeastern United States. Will

Anthony retired in the early 1940s, and his sons assumed responsibility for the operation. The company sold to Weyerhaeuser in 1977, and the mill closed in 1982. The old Anthony mill property is now being used by Ward Shavings, LLC, run by Henry Ward, which employs about 22 people who make wood chips and shavings for poultry houses and pet stores.

Murfreesboro Post Office, 1962—
Mid-century Modern building

Walk north on Kelley Street (by post office).

Gray building behind post office—
In the mid-20th century, this was Walls Launderette, run by J. W. and Betty Walls, who lived in the apartment upstairs. In the late 1960s, washing was 20 cents per load and drying was 10 cents for 10 minutes. The launderette was open 7 days a week from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Point to water pump beside the Conway Hotel—for hotel patrons to water their horses.

Walk back to E. Main and around to northeast corner of square.

Pike County Bank (now Diamond State Insurance Agency)—
The Pike County Bank was built in 1905, and at that time had a capital stock of \$250,000. Officers were J. C. Pennix, J. F. Davis, and Jesse N. Riley (cashier). The Pike County Bank was extensively remodeled with a new brick veneer and metal siding. In the late 1970s, it became Diamond State Bank. The bank's current name is Diamond Bank, and it is located about a block away on E. Main. The building just to the north of the old bank was a drive-through window by the late 1960s. It is now enclosed with a modern storefront.

There was a free-standing beauty shop just south of the Featherston Building (no longer extant).

Featherston Building, 1937—

The Featherston Building was constructed in 1937 (see panel on façade) and is an excellent example of the mixed masonry technique, using a combination of buff brick and stone with grapevine mortar. The south side of the building was Alfred and Jimmy Featherston's law office, and the north side was Raymond Brock and Kenny Vaught's barber shop. The Featherston's office still has the vault where they kept legal documents and abstract records.

Conway Hotel (NR-listed 3/6/1986)—

Built in 1913-14 by lumberman W. J. Lockeby, Murfreesboro's first brick hotel was purchased in March 1914 by Joel H. Conway, Sr., former proprietor of the wood-frame Conway House on E. Main Street. In order to differentiate between the two buildings, this was known as the New Conway Hotel. J. H. Conway's son, Grover Conway, and his wife, Annie, ran the hotel. Grover and Annie were divorced in 1917, and he married Edna Thomasson. He and Edna ran the hotel until her death in 1927. Grover remarried again, this time to Irene Fagan, who worked at the hotel for many years. After Grover Conway's death in 1932, his first wife and mother to two of his children, Annie, and her second husband, M. J. "Scotty" Eunison, managed the Conway Hotel.

The Conway Hotel was built to provide additional lodging for the prospectors and businessmen who arrived in Murfreesboro after the discovery of diamonds nearby, and the hotel continued to serve as a hub of activity into the 1950s. The hotel had a Western Union Telegraph office beginning in 1933, and it was the local stop for several commercial bus lines, including Continental Trailways. The hotel's elegant dining room was closed in the 1940s, and a coffee shop was built onto the hotel's east side. The Conway Hotel coffee shop was a popular gathering place in the 1940s and '50s.

After the death of Annie Conway Eunison, the Conway Hotel was sold in 1967 to Zadie and James T. Smith. The hotel closed in 1974. The vacant hotel was purchased in 1989 by the Murfreesboro Community Foundation. In 2010 Gordon Hines, owner of the Little Shamrock Motel, bought the Conway Hotel, now called the Ireland Hotel, and renovated it for overflow lodging from the Shamrock.

It is a Craftsman-style building with exposed rafter tails and a full front porch supported by tapered columns on square bases.

Murfreesboro Cities Service Station (NR-listed 5/19/2003)—

The Murfreesboro Cities Service Station was constructed on the site of the ca. 1912 A. P. Terrell Building. The Terrell Building housed Terrell Brothers Men's Store, which sold men's clothing and shoes. It may have also been a location of Stell & Adams Dry Goods at some point.

In 1939 A. P. Terrell built the Cities Service Station using brick from the old Terrell Building that was previously on this site. The station was constructed using a standard company design and still has the Cities Service logo in the ocular opening on the south gable end. The small, English Revival-style stations were popular in the 1930s. There are identical National Register-listed Cities Service Stations at Rison (Cleveland County) and Clinton (Van Buren County).

The station was leased to the Arkansas Fuel Oil Company and operated for two years by Alton Terrell. It remained a gas station until the 1980s. The Murfreesboro Community Foundation purchased the building in the late '80s and repaired it, reconstructing the west gable, which had been removed. It was an office for the Chamber of Commerce, but is now vacant. Nowadays, locals often meet at the old service station to have their morning coffee.

The pavilion is relatively new—dates from the 1980s.

The shovel, pick, and sifting pan in the median were part of a 1986 memorial fountain dedicated to Mrs. Carolyn Lewis. The fountain was filled in due to vandalism (pouring soap in the fountain), and is now a rock-filled planter.

Questions?

Extras:

In 1944 the MD&G Railroad transported about 300 German prisoners to a POW camp on the northwestern edge of Murfreesboro. The prisoners were moved out by May 1946. The area is now a city park and ball fields.