

Business

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moved the wooden shacks housing his office, drug store, ice house and stables off the lot at the southeast corner of Main and Mitchell streets. In their place he built the Mitchell Hotel with his drug store on the left side and the hotel dining room on the right side of the main floor.

On North Railroad Street, Odom and Hill had moved their new store, and the Masons met in the hall on the second floor.

Ahoskie's commercial history includes general retail stores, wholesale and warehouse building, hotels, banks, sawmills, cotton gins, auto showrooms and service stations, and funeral homes.

The first commercial buildings in Ahoskie were commissaries or general stores to supply the needs of loggers after the logging railroad opened in 1885.

The town's first store, Riddick and Freeman, was located on St. Johns Road (now Church Street) at its intersection with the railroad.

For some reason, perhaps because the logging siding was further north, Main Street soon developed as the major business location, rather than Church Street, even though Main was not a through street until the 1920's.

Business lots small

Lots in the business section of Main and Railroad streets were small, 20 to 30 feet deep, enabling even the smallest entrepreneur to buy and build a modest store. At first, buildings often were shallow and then lengthened to the depth of the lot as the business grew.

The dense concentration of businesses along Main and Railroad streets offered customers much convenience. At first, each owner held as his own the space in front, constructing a porch or veranda as part of his store. Later sidewalks were constructed for pedestrians so they could avoid cars and trucks.

The streets were not paved until the 1920's, and it was not unusual for cars to get stuck in the mud, even on Main Street.

Existing commercial buildings in Ahoskie date back from the early 1900's to the present.

The E.J. Gerock Department Store at the southeast corner of Main and Railroad streets is intact, although the windows are shuttered and the brick has been painted. The decorative brickwork still shows why it was considered "perhaps the most handsome in town" when it was built in 1910.

The first specialized commercial buildings were the hotels, although both the Hotel Comfort, which was opened in 1906, and the Mitchell Hotel, which was opened in 1910, were still the typical double storefronts.

The later Garrett Hotel, which was opened in 1926, had more of the specialized public lobby and dining space usually associated with hotels. It also had commercial space for lease on the ground floor with the hotel rooms on the second and third floors.

AHS

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of conversation.

In 1924, it was proposed that Ahoskie consolidate and bring in children from four neighboring small schools at Earley's, Harrell's, Hickory Chapel and Brantley Grove. In 1927, the Earley's school burned, and this district was a consolidated with Ahoskie by means of a special election.

After some controversy it was decided that the new school building would stand at Academy and Main streets on the same site as the old one, which would be torn down.

The new school cost \$64,395. The auditorium of the old school became a wing of the new one and was used as a gymnasium.

The new school had 30 rooms — eight for high school, 16 for elementary, two for home economics, two labs and two commercial classes. It also had a library, an auditorium that could seat 900 people, a reading room, principal's office, reception room, and a gymnasium with showers and dressing facilities.

The cornerstone for an agricultural building was laid in 1935, and the home economics cottage was erected in 1940 with the aid of the National Youth Administration.

In 1946, the state appropriated \$25,000 for the construction of a gymnasium. The old gym then became a cafeteria.

Basnight gave fountain

W.H. Basnight gave the fountain in front of the school in memory of his son, Howard Jr., in 1946.

In 1950, Basnight donated the site for a five-room band building and paid for the construction.

In the 1960's, several Butler building were erected on the back campus to accommodate a steadily increasing enrollment. One was for

Warehouses

The Hub Warehouse, built in 1907, was constructed of brick with a unique stepped parapet gable facing Lloyd Street. It set the style for the frame Basnight Warehouse across Main Street in 1919.

The Farmers Warehouse was also known as the "Iron" Warehouse for the corrugated metal sliding used on the building. The other, more recent tobacco warehouses were constructed with more typical, less distinctive facades.

Banks

The town's first bank, appropriately named the Bank of Ahoskie, was organized in 1905 and was housed in a modest one-story brick building on East Main Street until its conservative board of directors finally agreed to build a larger, more impressive building during the recovery of the 1920's.

The site chosen was the most prominent in town — Main and Railroad streets, across the open space from the railroad station.

The Farmers-Atlantic Bank, "the new bank in town," was built in 1914.

Sessoms Building

The Sessoms Building, erected in about 1920, was the largest commercial building in Ahoskie until recent years.

Richard Theater

The Richard Theater, built by J.R. Garrett in 1927, played an important role in the social history of Ahoskie.

The entry and lobby were an earlier commercial storefront which had been used as a small mercantile and movie theater before the Richard was built.

Automobile business

The first automobile showroom was built in about 1915, the Newbern Building on East Main Street.

The J.C. Sessoms Building, completed in the late 1930's, had larger show windows and higher ceilings to display new cars.

Standard Chevrolet and Chas. H. Jenkins Motors built even more extensive showrooms in the late 1940's for their General Motors franchises.

Service stations

The Sinclair Station on West Main Street, built in the 1930's, was totally oriented to the automobile and was set back from the corner, breaking up the uniform front of the business district.

Funeral homes

Undertakers and mortuaries originally had been located in typical storefronts until the 1930's, when more appropriate space was needed for the wakes and funerals that had moved from the home and church to the "funeral home."

The Garrett Funeral Home on the east side of South Railroad Street was an example of a building constructed specifically for this use.

Two other funeral homes, Reynolds and Hunter's, have served the black population for many years.

an auto mechanics lab, and three trailer classrooms were used.

However, a new school building on West First Street was constructed a few years later and housed the high school grades. The old building was converted into a junior high, or middle, school.

Finally, a few years ago high schools in Ahoskie and Murfreesboro were consolidated into Hertford County School in the same buildings. The Murfreesboro school then became Hertford County Middle School.

Editor's note: Dennis Brown wrote this article for the *Historical Issue of The Pow Wow*, the student newspaper of Ahoskie High School, in May, 1969. He got much of his information from the book, *The Ahoskie Era of Hertford County*, by Roy Parker Sr.

Football

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Bears.

After Allen retired, Carl Brock became the head coach. Murray and Charles Simmons were athletic directors, and Jane Burke was principal. Assistant coaches were Phipps, Lancaster, Paul Moore, David Edwards, Jeff Edwards and Calvin Moore.

HCBS won the 1990 conference title.

In November, 1990, a stuffed bear mascot was donated by Nicole Stallings of Harrellsville and presented by Murray for school display.

Editor's note: Tommy Mitchell wrote this article in memory of his father, Theo Mitchell, and his coaches, Jack Young and Calvin Freeman. Information was compiled from AHS yearbooks, *The News-Herald* clippings and personal interviews.

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