

15 East Main Street

Researched and Written by Ruth Ann Montgomery

The current location of the Mosher Insurance Agency at 15 East Main Street contains the remnants of one of the oldest commercial buildings in Evansville. The building, designated on deed records as Lot 6 of Block 9, of the original plat of Evansville, was divided, as though it were two separate stores, with two addresses 15 and 17 East Main. There were living quarters on the second floor of each address. The property has served as home to nearly every type of commercial business. The history of this building also serves as a guide to the economy trends over the last 170 years.

An early history of Rock County published in the late 1850s lists John Rhinehart as a merchant in Evansville. According to deed records and early maps, his store was located on Lot 6 of Block 9 of the original plat of Evansville.

John Rhinehart arrived in the Evansville area in the spring of 1840. John's wife, Deborah Campbell Rhinehart, was related by birth and marriage to many of the early families who settled in Union township in the 1840s including the Spencer, Winston, and Campbell families.

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Deborah's sister, Elizabeth Campbell Spencer (Mrs. George Spencer) wrote this brief history of her sister, Deborah and the early pioneer days in the February 11, 1915 issue of the Evansville Review.



"My sister's husband, John Rhinehart came from La Porte, Ind. in the spring of 1840 and took up land about one mile east of the Ball Tavern. He broke a few acres, planted some corn and potatoes, partly finished a log house, then he went back to Indiana. That fall he returned with his family to this new home. There were no doors, windows, or floor in the house. Blankets were hung up at the opening."

The Rhinehart family was recorded in the 1840 Census of Rock County. This census was finished on the 18th day of July 1840 and according to the census taker, was made "by actual enquiry at every dwelling house or a personal inquiry of the head of every family."

Only the name of the head of household was listed, followed by the ages and sex of the others in the household. John Rhinehart is listed as the head of household and at that time was probably living in what is now the Town of Porter, east of Evansville. The boundaries of the townships changed after 1840. The Rhinehart household included 1 male under 5 and 2 males 20-30 years old. There was also 1 female, age 15-20 and 1 female, age 20-30, making the total in the household of five people.

Ten years later, the 1850 census listed John Rhinehart as a 38 year old farmer from Virginia. The value of his real estate was \$2,000. Deborah Rhinehart was 35 and born in Vermont. Their children, John B., age 8; Mary D., age 6; Jarvis, age 5; and Martha age 1, were all born in Wisconsin.

John Rhinehart and his wife were charter members of Evansville's Methodist church. John also served as Secretary on the Board of Trustees for the Evansville Seminary, established in 1855.

In the late 1850s, John Rhinehart gave up farming and moved into the newly platted community of Evansville. He built a general store and the building was described as being one story high, with an oak frame made from native timber.

It was a poor time to establish his business and take on debt. Rhinehart mortgaged his farm, built a house on North Madison Street, and bought merchandise on credit from New York and Chicago wholesalers. His store ledger included a variety of entries. He sold ribbon, shovels, crow bars, vests, gloves, candles, coffee, tea, nails, Irish linen, cranberries, and gingham. His customers included many of the early settlers, Henry G. Spencer, William Patterson, Zenas Gibbs, Joel Campbell, George Ballard, and Simon VanPatten. Note: The Rhinehart ledger is available online at the University of Wisconsin Digital Collections: <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/WI.RhinehartLedger>

Hard economic times in the late 1850s forced Rhinehart to borrow from at least three men and he used the store building as collateral. Deed records show that he borrowed \$1,100 in 1857 from John Conkling; \$1,400 in 1858 from George Dibble and in 1858, another \$1,783.32 from his brother-in-law William B. Winston.

R. WINSTON. R. F. WOODBURY.

WINSTON AND WOODBURY

Keep on hand a well selected stock of

DRY GOODS,

GROCERIES,

CROCKERY,

Glass Ware &c.

Bring your Butter and Eggs and you shall receive

GOODS CHEAP.

We guarantee price and quality.

TEAS A SPECIALTY.

If you want a good cup of Tea call and try our new article just received.

Evansville, Aug. 26th, 1875. n17

By 1860, the business was a failure and he closed the store. Rhinehart's creditor, George Dibble bought the property from a Rock County Sheriff's sale and sold it to John and Reuben Winston in October 1863. Rhinehart packed up his goods and went to Janesville where he boarded a train to New York. Then he took a steamer to Panama, crossed the Isthmus, and went by ship to San Francisco. Rhinehart never returned to Evansville.

For the next 60 years, the property remained in the hands of the Winston family. John and his son, Reuben Winston took over the general store business. It was their second venture with an Evansville general store. They first tried farming and later operated a general store with Reuben's brother, Nelson Winston, at the southwest corner of the Main and Madison Street intersection. Nelson Winston continued to operate the store with a new partner, Isaac Bennett after John and Reuben moved their business to the Rhinehart store on East Main in 1863.

Then Reuben bought out his aging father in 1864. Evansville was a thriving community and a December 21, 1864 Janesville Gazette article written by an Evansville correspondent described the businesses operating in Evans-

ville. "We have three dry goods stores, two groceries, and clothing, hardware and drug, one each; three harness, three shoe, and three blacksmith establishments, (one smith a contraband); two wheelright shops, a flouring mill, and two hotels, in all about twenty-five business and manufacturing establishments; three churches, but five different societies, a fine Masonic Lodge, and a hall for lectures; a Literary Society, singing schools &c. but to crown all, the Evansville Seminary." During the latter part of the Civil War, several former slaves arrived in Evansville, one was a blacksmith designated in this article as contraband.

In the late 1860s, after his father's retirement, Reuben Winston changed the name of the store to R. Winston & Co. Winston and his partners advertised groceries and stone ware. Above the store, Reuben rented rooms to women who operated a millinery and dressmaking business.

The store was enlarged by adding a second story. It was divided with the Woodbury store in the west side and a barbershop in the east side. The barbershop area changed renters many times, but remained a barber shop for many years. Winston took in various partners over the next few years, including Daniel Lovejoy, R. F. Woodbury and William H. Van Hise. Lovejoy and Van Hise went on to open their own businesses and in 1873, Reuben Winston opened up a lumber yard. R. F. Woodbury became the sole proprietor of the grocery and crockery business, while Reuben Winston and his father maintain ownership of the building.

From 1874 to 1876 the newly formed Grange Organization rented the east side of the Winston property for a general store. In 1876, the Grange built their own store to the east and a few years later decided to build a firewall between their building and the Winston store. Winston negotiated with the Grange Store to share the fire wall. The brick wall was to be 18 inches thick and extend above the ridge of the buildings.

Barbers who operated in the east building included Jay Williams in the early 1880s, followed by Fred L. Singer, in 1885.

CITY BARBER SHOP,

1st door west of Grange Store,

EVANSVILLE,

J. L. WILLIAMS, Pro'r.

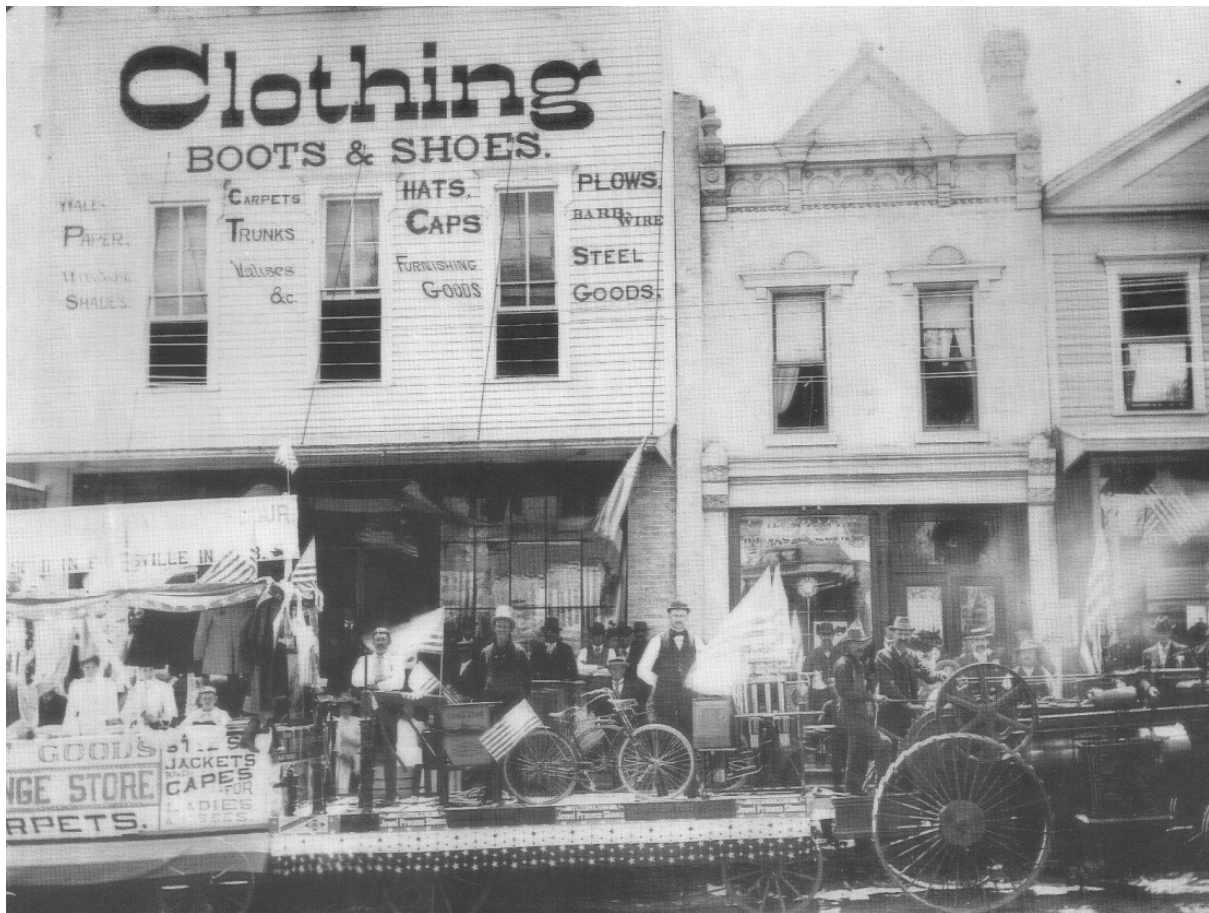
The only first-class tonsorial rooms in town,
where you can get a good, clean, easy shave and
hair dressed in the latest styles of the art.
The public generally, and traveling men in
particular, are invited to call and give me a
trial.

526f

In June 1890, Reuben Winston decided to rebuild the west part of the store that was the location of the barbershop of John H. Johnson. "Reuben Winston is negotiating for the west wall of the Grange store with the intention of joining thereto and rebuilding the premises now occupied by J. H. Johnson, barber. He will build to the height of his Woodbury store, and not only have high, airy rooms below but the same in the second story. The location is good and will command good rentage."

By September 1890, Isaac Brink, a brick mason had the stone work of Reuben's store complete and was ready to put up the brick portion. By November the building was enclosed and the inte-

rior work was being completed. The first floor was Charles Spencer's boot and shoe business. It was described as having high ceilings, clean walls, electric lights and a large class front. On the second story was an apartment and office rented to Dr. Theodore Stair.



1894 Fourth of July parade with Grange store on the left, and the Winston stores on the right. A brick fire wall divides the properties.

When Reuben Winston died in May 1893, his two daughters, Amanda Butts and Kathleen Kling, inherited the store buildings. They had no interest in operating businesses, but kept the buildings as rental property. Their mother, Helen Winston, helped manage the property.

R. F. Woodbury continued to operate his grocery business in the east side of the building until his death in 1899. It was a tragic death, and once again mirrored the economic times. An Evansville newspaper reported: "R. F. Woodbury came to his death from an overdose of poison, suppose to be morphine, administered by his own hands. Business reverses, financial difficulties, and family troubles are no doubt the cause. Mr. Woodbury was 69 years of age. He had been in the general mercantile business here in the same building for at least 30 years, for some time in partnership with Reuben Winston, deceased. It is now supposed his reverses date back about five years."

His son, Frank Woodbury, took over the store, but refused to pay rent to the Winston heirs, saying that he was only employed to work in the store for his deceased father. The women sued for \$300 store rent. After Frank Woodbury was forced out, Fred N. Winston, occupied the east side of the building and the Steel sisters, operated a millinery store.

The west side of the building became a bakery operated by George Ewing. He and his family, including a wife and four children lived in the upstairs apartment. In early November 1907, there was a fire in the bakery oven that spread through the first floor.

Ewing was able to rescue his family, but the bakery equipment and stock were a complete loss. The east part of the building, occupied by Fred Winston and a shoe repairman, John Cole, was also badly damaged.

Fire Destroyed
Local Bakery

About six o'clock Monday morning, Geo. Ewing discovered the rear of his bakery on fire, and an alarm was given and soon our fire department was on the scene and in a short time had the fire under control. Mr. Ewing occupies the building owned by Mrs. Helen Winston of Janesville, and had been baking all night; while he was arranging the bakery goods in the front show cases, it is thought the fire started from the oven. After giving the alarm, Mr. Ewing ran upstairs to arouse his wife and four children, who were asleep, and had some difficulty in rescuing them, as the flames were already licking the bed clothes, and the smoke was so intense. The bakery stock which was a total loss was partially covered by insurance. The clothing and furniture in the two rear rooms upstairs were also badly damaged; there was an insurance on the household goods.

The rear end of the adjoining building occupied by John Cole and Fred Winston was also badly damaged. Mrs. Ida Gray and sons who occupied the rooms above, lost some clothing and furniture.

We understand there was no insurance on the buildings.

November 5, 1907, The Tribune
Evansville, Wisconsin

The building was repaired and a few months later Arthur Devine and his partner Mike Morgan opened a barber shop in the former bakery on the west side of the building. They called their new business, the Sanitary Barber Shop.

Another fire in the building occurred in July 1914. Although it was quickly put out by using fire extinguishers from nearby businesses, the loss was estimated at \$400 and included one barber's chair, mirrors and windows, and towels.

Various real estate agencies handled the rental for the absentee landlords until the building was sold in September 1921. The Evansville Review reported that Reuben Winston's daughters, Amanda E. Butts and Kate Kling, sold the buildings to P. N. Peterson, who intended to open a bakery in the east side of the building.

Devine and Morgan continued their business in the west side of the building. The new owner forced a grocery store, operated by Joe Eastman, to find a different location.

The new owner, Peter N. Peterson, was a native of Denmark. He came to America in 1905 and settled in Kenosha. When he purchased the business in Evansville in 1921, he had 25 years experience in the baking business and owned his own bakery equipment.

Within a few months, he was making the building fire proof by Kellastoning the exterior of the building at 15 East Main. The product was manufactured by the National Kellastone Company in Chicago.

The old Winston building on Main street, which was purchased about a year ago by Mr. Peterson is being Kellastoned this week. This makes the third old building to be made fire proof on that side of the street during the last year.

August 17, 1922, Evansville Review

In addition to a fire proofing material, the stucco application was advertised as hardening like rock and “lasting for ages.” He also added a brick garage to the back of the bakery oven on the south side of the building. He anticipated the heat from the oven would keep the garage warm in the winter.

In the 1930s, the business began to fail and Peterson borrowed against the building to try to keep the business going. He pleaded for help from local citizens and placed a lengthy article in the December 31, 1936 Evansville Review, complaining that sales by out-of-town baking corporations were spoiling his business. “There is big profit in the baking business, but one lone man cannot successfully cope with five large out-of-town bakeries,” he said. On the 17th of April 1937, the property was sold at a sheriff’s sale to the man Peterson had borrowed money from, John E. Hansen.

Hansen rented the east side of the building, 17 East Main to H. A. Langemak. Langemak had been a partner in the Economy store. The Depression had forced him out of the department store and he opened his own business selling men’s clothing. When his wife died in 1939, Langemak gave up the business and moved to Texas.

Hansen rented the west side of the property to several different businesses. A grocery business owned by Grover and Mae Holmes moved into the west side of the building, 15 East Main Street, in 1938 and over the next few years was operated by Mr. and Mrs. C. W. Hazlett, (1941) later by Mr. and Mrs. Clyde Patterson, (1950) and Bill and Lola Erbs and Francis and Ann Erbs (1958).

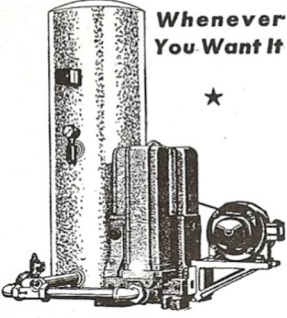


Jim and Clyde Patterson outside of grocery at 15 East Main and doors from the grocery.

Baker Manufacturing Company opened up a retail store in the former Langemak clothing store in 1943. The store handled servicing for Baker engines and windmills and was operated by Earl Knappenberger and Carroll Bly.

PLENTY of WATER

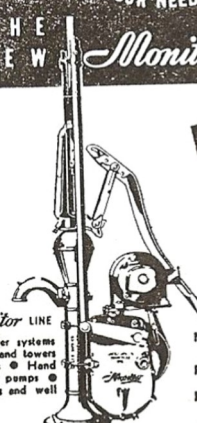
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BAKER SALES AND SERVICE

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17 East Main Street

January 20, 1949, Evansville Review, Evansville, Wisconsin

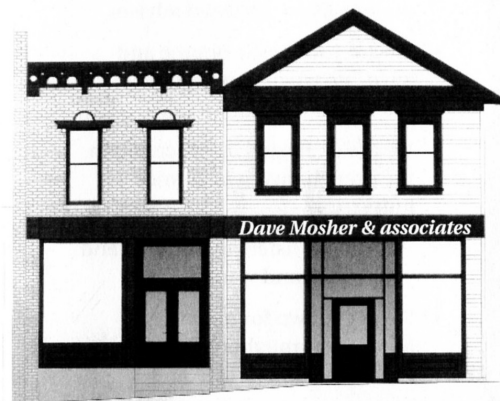
When the Baker Manufacturing Company closed their retail store, a shoe repairman used the building until it was once again a barbershop. Jim Knapp opened his barbershop in the building in 1959. Beginning in 1973, Steve Krattiger, another barber, used the space for his shop.

When the property owner, John Hansen died in 1949, the property was held as a rental property by his wife Mathilda. After she died in September 1956, the property was purchased by Vernon L. Hagen and his wife Marilyn. Vernon was a chiropractor who practiced in Evansville, later selling the business to another chiropractor, John Wilke, Sr. in 1976.

In 1980, the new owner, Roger Berg, purchased the property and hired George Dell to paint the upstairs apartments. When Dell removed the wallpaper from the interior walls, several times he found his father's name, also George Dell, written on the walls with the earliest date being 1911. Both father and son were in the interior decorating business and the removal of more wallpaper revealed later dates when the father and son had repapered the walls.

Dave Mosher purchased the buildings and turned them into an office building for his insurance agency. The building was renovated in 2009 and 2010.

Dave Mosher **& associates** —insurance services—



Our office is located in
Evansville's historic downtown.

*Celebrating 100 Years
of Dedicated Service*

Evansville Office

15 E. Main Street

PO Box 18

Evansville, WI 53536-0018

Phone 608-882-0000

Email: insure@mosherinsurance.com

This property has a history as rich as the history of Evansville. Probably no other building in Evansville has housed a greater variety of businesses.