

HISTORIC MAIN STREET WALKING TOUR

Compiled by W. F. Jannke III

In 1841, John and Luther Cole, brothers who had come to Watertown from Vermont in 1837, opened up the very first retail store on what is now our Main Street. At that time, this was a wilderness containing a muddy wagon path lined with the occasional sink hole, a stretch of Rock River that had to be forded since no bridge yet spanned the banks, and a few scattered log dwellings.

By 1845 there were about 20 shops on the street and by the mid 1850s, many of the buildings that now front Main Street were in place. In the short span of 10 years this barren landscape had grown to become one of the busiest thoroughfares in southeastern Wisconsin.

Main Street's glory days came in the late 1800s and early 1900s. At that time merchants developed new methods of bringing in customers, and shops stayed open until 9:00p.m. on Fridays in order to cater to customers who couldn't shop during the day.

The sheer number of shops on the street were testimony to the number of people who frequented the commercial district. There were at least 5 bakeries at one time, several "dime stores", several meat markets, and shoe and clothing stores that catered to both men and women.

As the years went by and tastes changed, the stores on Main Street began to close up, beginning with Woolworth's in 1975, followed by Kresge's dime store in 1983 and Kusel's Hardware in 1985. Where once it was a bustling downtown, now crowds began to dwindle, drawn by the convenience of large stores on the south side of the city. Things looked bleak.

However, since the early 1990s a concerted effort has been made by the downtown merchants and other interested individuals to spruce up the Main Street buildings and to remind people of the history and heritage that exists on our Main Street.

This tour was designed to showcase some of the more historic sites along Watertown's Main Street and to remind people that there is beauty even in the common-place. Come visit Watertown and walk along its Main Street. You'll be glad you did.

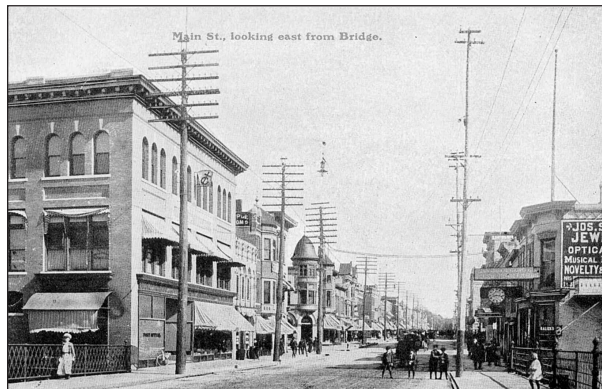
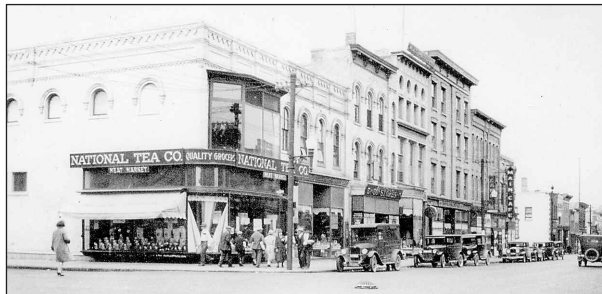
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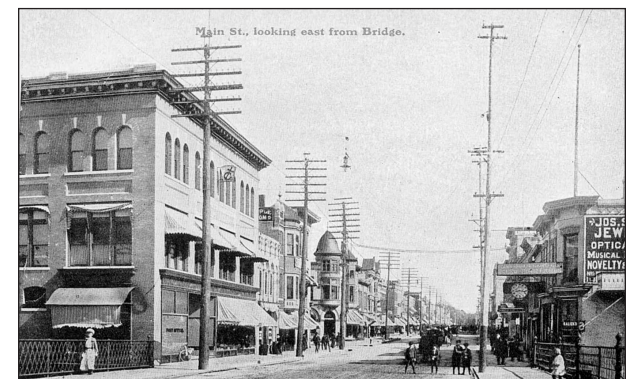
A 50476 Main Street, Watertown, Wis.



SOUTH SIDE OF MAIN STREET, FROM BRIDGE, LOOKING EAST.
1887.



WALKING TOURS MAIN STREET



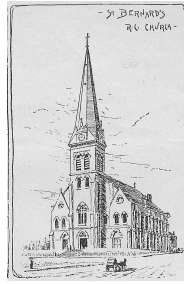
*A Guide to the Historic Neighborhoods
of Watertown produced by the:*

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MAIN & CHURCH STREETS

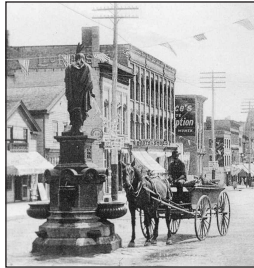
1 114 S. CHURCH STREET
St. Bernard's Catholic Church.
Founded by Irish Catholics in 1843, the present building was erected beginning in 1873 and dedicated in 1876. The corner stone is cut from the Rock of Cashel in Ireland. It is the oldest Catholic Church in Watertown.



2 314 WEST MAIN STREET
Built in the 1860s by pioneer settler Patrick Rogan, this is the sole remaining Italianate home on Main Street. Note the cupola which provided light for the interior staircase. From the 1930s to the 1970s, this was known as the Boyle-Helser Funeral Home.

WASHINGTON STREET INTERSECTS

3 SITE OF THE INDIAN STATUE
In the middle of Main and Washington Streets, from 1896 to 1923, stood the famous Indian fountain, which is today located on the grounds of the Octagon House museum. It was originally a gift to the city by benefactors George and Fannie Lewis. It was struck by an automobile in 1923 and moved to a city park until the early 1960s when it became a fixture on the lawn of the city's museum.



4 212 WEST MAIN STREET
Mullen's Dairy Bar & Eatery
The oldest ice cream parlor in the city, founded in the early 1930s by the Mullen family Irish immigrants. Homemade ice cream can still be found in this family friendly restaurant. Soup and sandwiches are also available. A mural painted on the side of the building highlights the history of the dairy industry in the area.

5 100 S. WATER STREET
Watertown Public Library
The library is the site of one of the early hotels in Watertown, the American House, which was opened in the late 1840s. For much of the nineteenth century it was known by various names, including the Lindon House, the Tremont House, and the Union Hotel. The hotel building burned down in the 1890s and in 1907 the city built the present library building, funded in part by a generous donation by philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. The library itself was founded in 1903 in an upper floor suite of rooms further down Main Street. The addition was added in 1984.

WATER STREET INTERSECTS

6 206 WEST MAIN STREET
This was originally the site of the West Avenue House, also known as the Belvedere Hotel and the Grand Hotel. The Assembly of God Church, currently located on S. Church Street, was also founded in this building.

7 200 WEST MAIN STREET
This building dates to the 1870s and has seen several different owners and businesses, including the Watertown School of Business in the 1880s, E.W. Schultz, furniture and undertaking, Tri County Tobacco, The Youth Activity Center, Baumann's Candy Kitchen, Emil's Pizza, Pizza Junction and presently Curves, a health center for women.

8 121 WEST MAIN STREET
This was the site of a log dwelling on the west side of the Rock River. Built by the first Irish settler, James Rogan, in about 1837, this spot became so well visited that he took to calling his home the "Hotel deRogan". Later occupants of this site included a saloon kept by the Schott Bros., one kept by William Beisner, another kept by the Herro family, the Streamline Bar and the Feed Bag.

9 120 WEST MAIN STREET
Originally, this was the home of the Watertown Gazette, a weekly newspaper edited by James Moore. Later occupants included the Schimmel Cigar Co. and the Sunny Side Hatchery.

10 118 WEST MAIN STREET
This was the site of the James B. Murphy paint and decorating store from the 1870s to the 1940s. The suite of buildings was erected in the early 1850s and originally housed the first bank in Jefferson County, known as the Jefferson County Bank, which opened in 1854 and lasted through the 1860s.

11 114 WEST MAIN STREET
This was originally the site of the William Krahmer bakery, but more closely identified with the Pagel Bakery, famous for their fresh "semmel" (hard rolls) and their homemade potato chips. This bakery, which opened in the early 1900s, went out of business in the 1980s.

12 115 WEST MAIN STREET
Watertown Daily Times Office
Founded in 1895, this daily newspaper serves the city and Jefferson and Dodge counties.

13 109 WEST MAIN STREET
For many years this was the Doerr Drug Store, but originally this was the site of the very first drug store in Watertown, founded in 1844 by Edward Johnson. Johnson also brought the very first soda fountain into the state of Wisconsin.

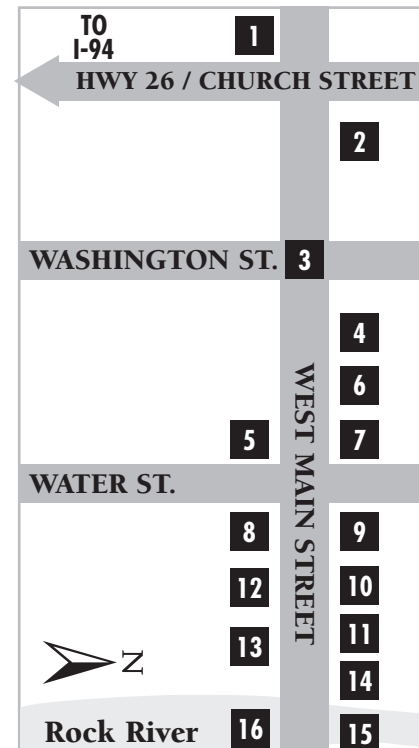
14 104 WEST MAIN STREET
Originally this was the site of the D. & F. Kusel Hardware Store, founded in 1849 and in existence until the mid 1980s. Also on this site was the Wiggernhorn Tobacco Co., housed in a building located next to the bridge. The building also contained the Wisconsin National Bank, WTTN Radio, and the Savoy Movie Theater. Both the Kusel and Wiggernhorn buildings were razed in 1985.

MAIN STREET BRIDGE

This bridge was constructed and dedicated in 1931. Paid for in part by funds from the John W. Cole estate, it is officially known as Cole Memorial Bridge. It is the last in a long line of bridges that have spanned the Rock River, starting with the first one in 1844.

15 LEFT, ON THE SIDE OF THE BRIDGE
Built on pilings on this side was the Werner Building, also known as "The German Bazaar". It housed several businesses including the first German printing office, barber, and jewelry store. It was washed away during the snow storm of March, 1881.

16 RIGHT, AT CENTER OF BRIDGE
Built on pilings here was the Henry Mae building, erected in the early 1850s. It was more closely associated with Peter Brook and used as an ice cream and fresh fruit store, with a billiard parlor in the basement. Later, it housed a barbershop. It was washed away in 1904.





17 RIGHT, AT HEAD OF THE WALKWAY

Black Hawk Marker

On this site in July 1832 the great Sauk Chief Black Sparrow Hawk crossed the Rock River in order to evade the U.S. Troops that were pursuing him and his band. At one time this site was known as “No. 1 Main Street” and for many years housed the Salick Jewelry Store, later Field’s Furniture and One Hour Martinizing. In the late 1980s the building was razied and the lovely River Walk Way and Courtyard was built. Note the mural here which depicts Watertown’s rich German heritage.



18 2 EAST MAIN STREET

Originally on this site were several different small shops including the Watertown Steam Laundry, Lee’s Bathing Saloon, John B. May’s photographic studio and the New York Market. In 1903, the Masons built the present building and it operated as the Masonic Temple until the 1960’s when a new headquarters was built on Madison Street. Fischer’s Department Store moved into this building about the same time. At one time the Watertown Daily Times had offices in the basement. The department store closed in 2007.



19 14 EAST MAIN STREET

This was the former Bank of Watertown building, built originally by A.L. Pritchard in the 1860s. The first building here was three stories high, but a 1916 remodeling project resulted in a floor being removed and the impressive stone front added.

FIRST STREET INTERSECTS

20 100 EAST MAIN STREET

This building housed the Merchant’s Bank from 1892 until it closed and became the M & T Bank in the late 1960s. Originally on this site was the very first building to ever grace Main Street, the Exchange Hotel, built by Isaac Savage for the Gilman Bros. in 1840. This building was picked up and moved in 1892 to its present location on the corner of S. First & Milwaukee Streets.

21 101 EAST MAIN STREET

Originally on this site was the second hotel to be established here, the Planters, which opened in 1843. It burned to the ground in 1868. The present building was erected in about 1871. This building at one time housed the City Hall, the Watertown Daily Times, the telephone company, the post office and also Chas. Gamm’s drug store.

22 103-105 EAST MAIN STREET

This block of buildings was at one time referred to as the Cambria Block. Many music teachers had their offices here. In the early part of the 1900s through the 1950s, this was the site of the Main Café. Bismarck’s encompasses the old Main Cafe and what was Drost’s Smoke Shop, a popular magazine shop in Watertown in the 1960s and 1970s.

23 111 EAST MAIN STREET

This building was erected by Theodore Racek in about 1867 and redecorated in the 1890s with a lovely art nouveau sea motif around the top of the building’s facade. It was for many years the site of the W.D. Sproesser Company, dealers in jewelry and musical instruments.

24 110 EAST MAIN STREET

Keck Furniture is the oldest furniture store in Wisconsin, having opened its doors in 1853, the same year Watertown was granted a city charter. Originally this building had a distinctive double bay at the top of the building, but sometime after the end of WWI the building took on the look it has today.

25 117 EAST MAIN STREET

On this site in November 1841, the Cole Brothers, John & Luther, opened the very first retail store in Watertown. This store was only open at night, since the Coles had to tend to their farm during the day. The original building was destroyed by fire in 1864 and the present building was erected in 1868. For many years this was Strauss & Sette, a dry goods firm. Later it became the National Tea Co. grocery store and then Wurtz’s Paint & Floor Covering.

26 116 EAST MAIN STREET

John W. Cole erected a store building on this site a few years after he and his brother opened their store on 117 East Main Street. Here he sold feed and dry goods. This store burned down in the late 1860s and the substantial brick block was erected in the early 1870s. It housed the Joseph Harvey Saloon, the Bittner & Tetzlaff Drug Store and later the Lewis & Clark Apothecary Shop. In the late 1970s it became Jan’s Luncheonette and since has housed several diners.

SECOND STREET INTERSECTS

27 201 EAST MAIN STREET

This impressive brick building was built by John W. Cole in 1854 and housed several different shops, including the Gas & Electric Co., the Olympia Candy Kitchen and the Grube & Achtenhagen Store. In the early 1920s it became the home for the J.C. Penney Co., which lasted until the late 1980s. The upper floor of this building houses a ballroom and lecture hall which saw the likes of Horace Greeley and Carl Schurz.

28 200 EAST MAIN STREET

This was the site of an early retail store, the “Old Dutch Store”, run by the the firm of Peterson & Maldaner. The main part of the building was erected in 1851, with east bays being added in 1853. For many years this building was associated with the Beuerhaus family. It later became a general store, a shirt waist factory and a women’s clothing store.

29 209 EAST MAIN STREET

This red brick fronted building housed Watertown’s leading department store from the late 1840s to 1936, the Schempf Bros. “Big Cash Store”. When this concern closed its doors, the Montgomery-Ward Co., and Kresge Co. took over the site. In 1957 the S.S. Kresge Co. took over the entire building and ran a “dime store” until 1983. After they left, Klines Department store took over this spot and the former Penney’s building and ran a clothing store until 1994.

30 208 EAST MAIN STREET

This was the site of Palace Theatre, the first movie theater in Watertown. It was the third movie theater in Wisconsin, opened by Charles Herro in 1903.

31 210-216 EAST MAIN STREET

Today the site of The Brown Shoe Fit Co., it originally encompassed several smaller businesses including Meyer’s Shoe Store, Herro’s Tot & Teen Shop, the A&P Grocery Store, Otto Schott’s Cafe, the Gas and Electric Co., and the Deutsches Dorf Saloon.

THIRD STREET INTERSECTS

32 300 EAST MAIN STREET

This building, known as the “Central Block building” was erected by the firm of Keck & Lehmann in 1857 and housed the Farmer’s & Citizens Bank, as well as one of the first jails in the city.

33 301 EAST MAIN STREET

This building was the home of the Platz & Brandt General Store. Later it became the Brandt & Abele Store, then W.F. Brandt’s, then the People’s Fruit Market, Field’s Furniture, Gambles and finally Klines Department store. After Klines moved it became the Ben Franklin store for many years.

34 308 EAST MAIN STREET

Originally this was the home of the H.P. Seibel Company. In 1912, the Classic Movie Theater opened here. Since the 1970s, it has been known as the Towne Cinema.

35 317 EAST MAIN STREET

Built in the late 1800’s, this building is one of the few in downtown Watertown to have had little or no changes to its facade. It housed at one time the printing offices of the Watertown Weltburger, the city’s German-language newspaper, and the Watertown Grain Co., where farmers would come and bring their famous “stuffed geese” to market.

36 320 EAST MAIN STREET

This was the former Woolworth 5 & 10 Cent Store, which flourished here from the 1920s to 1975. Prior to that it was the home of the Adolph Miller Cigar Company. The buildings were erected in 1910.

FOURTH STREET INTERSECTS

37 400 EAST MAIN STREET

This was the site for many years of Gamm’s Crockery & China Store. This business dealt in fancy table settings and souvenir glassware. In 1940, the firm closed and soon after Otto’s Grocery Store opened and operated for many years, closing finally in the late 1970s.

Rock River		
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FIRST STREET		
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	25	26
SECOND STREET		
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THIRD STREET		
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FOURTH STREET		
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FIFTH STREET		
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SIXTH STREET		
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SEVENTH STREET		
		50

EAST MAIN STREET

38 401 EAST MAIN STREET

This was the home of the Schmutzler Funeral Home and a furniture store. Originally built in 1874 by Christoph Schroeder, it served as a saloon. Coffins were made in the rear of the building at one time. The funeral home moved from this location in the 1930s and the furniture store closed down in the 1980s. The Schmutzler Funeral Home still exists, and is now known as Schmutzler-Vick Funeral Home, located on the west side of the city.

39 409 EAST MAIN STREET

Built for F. Baebenroth in 1867, this building has housed a bookstore, tailor shop, a cigar shop, a millinery store and a fancy goods store.

40 416 EAST MAIN STREET

This one time this was known as “Turkey’s Roost” in honor of its famous owner, Arthur “Turkey” Gehrke. He was known as the “human hibernator” since he would take to his bed at the onset of winter and not rise from it until spring. Note the mural on the side of the building which is in Turkey’s honor.

FIFTH STREET INTERSECTS

41 500 EAST MAIN STREET

This was the site of the Methodist Church, which is the oldest religious body in the city. The church building stood here until the late 1970s when it was razed to make way for a tire store.This venture lasted six months and that building was then razed to build the present bank building.

42 501 EAST MAIN STREET

Originally on this site was the Waukesha Hotel, which flourished in the 1870s through 1937 when it was razed to make way for a Pure Oil Gas Station. That gas station was razed in the 1960s and the present building, then also a gas station, was erected.

43 510 EAST MAIN STREET

This is Watertown’s last drive in, in the old fashioned sense of the term. Originally on this site was the Charles Piper leather & harness store which burned to the ground in the 1950s.

44 516 EAST MAIN STREET

Built in the 1870s, this is one of the last of the old-time hotels in Watertown.

45 519 EAST MAIN STREET

This building, erected circa 1901, at one time housed the Christian Daufenbach saloon, Emil Kohli’s Swiss Head-quarters Saloon and then was made into a professional building by Dr. Louis Nowack in the 1920s. Since the late 1980s the Watertown Area Chamber of Commerce has owned this building.

SIXTH STREET INTERSECTS

46 600 EAST MAIN STREET

This was originally the site of several small businesses known as the Gorder Block, after William Gorder who ran a shoe store at the head of the block. In the early 1970s, these buildings were all razed to make way for a bank building.

47 607-611 EAST MAIN STREET

This has been one of the most patronized funeral homes in the city for many years. It was originally known as Kohls & Knaack, then Kohls & Hafemeister. Today it is known as Hafemeister Funeral Home & Cremation Service, and owned by the Nienow family of Watertown. A furniture store was also associated at one time with this business. The building dates to between about 1901 and 1909.

48 605 EAST MAIN STREET

This was the August Kramp Company, which was in existence from the early 1860s to the 1980s. They specialized in blacksmithing and machine repair and auto sales. After the Kramp Co. went out of business this became the home for the Ace Hardware Co., and later a video store and indoor golf course.

49 616-618 EAST MAIN STREET

For many years this was known as the East Side Bakery. The bakery closed in the late 1970s and became a florist’s shop.

SEVENTH STREET INTERSECTS

50 700 EAST MAIN STREET

This was the site of the Watertown High School from 1897 to 1917. Later, the building became the Armory and the Youth Activity Center. It was razed in the late 1960s and in the early 1970s the present building, then a Welcome Inn, was erected.

Please see our other historic walking tour maps available at the Watertown Area Chamber of Commerce.