

## Then & Now on Main Street: 264 Main Street

*By Karen Ferguson, Town Historian*

Main Street in the Village of Kirkwood is rich in history. Unfortunately, as time has gone by, the allure of Main Street has changed greatly. This street used to be beautifully lined with trees. The buildings that reside there were once home to merchants, wagon shops, restaurants, hotels, blacksmith shops, etc. I have decided to start a series called "Then and Now on Main Street" in an effort to inform current and future generations about its significant past.

The first home that I want to talk about is located at 264 Main Street. I chose this house because I was going through some files at the Kirkwood Historical Society and ran across a picture I hadn't seen before now. It was a picture of Stevens Dry Good store with a notation of its location. With the assistance of the current owner, Bev Osterhout, I was able to trace the history of this property and confirmed that indeed her house was once Stevens Dry Goods and Notions.

I was definitively able to date this house back to 1871 when Thomas Brink sold it to William B Vail and his wife. Clearly, Thomas Brink owned the house prior to that time but I am struggling to find out information as to whether or not he built it and in what year. I looked at a map from 1866 and it appears that the house is there. On the 1855 map, it is very difficult to pinpoint whether or not the house exists. Even so, this makes the house roughly 160 years old.

William B Vail, along with his wife, owned this house and the adjacent house according to the 1876 plat map. In 1888, the house was transferred from William B Vail and his wife to Tracey Vail. Two day later Tracy transferred it to Elizabeth Vail. In 1901, Mrs. William Vail Wicks transferred the home to Helen Stevens. These transfers show that Elizabeth Vail was William's wife, though her name had not appeared prior 1888. The name Mrs. William Vail Wicks was more than likely misspelled because I found paperwork that listed out names that had been used on these deed transfers: Elizabeth A. Vail, Elizabeth Vail Weeks, and Mrs. William Vail Wicks. In other documents verifying the title, only the names Elizabeth A Vail and Elizabeth Vail Weeks were listed. I searched death records and marriage records to find out if William B. had passed away and Elizabeth was remarried; however, I was not able to locate their names. An educated guess would assume that is what happened though.

I then researched as to whether or not this house was being used as a store during the time the Vail family owned it. I found one directory that listed William B Vail as an Inspector. If this house had been used as a store during their residency, it would have been noted in that directory.

Helen Stevens took possession of the house in 1901 and soon after converted it into a residence and a store called H.E. Stevens Dry Goods & Notions. There are three bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs. Due to their unusually large size, I wouldn't be surprised if one of these rooms was used as her living/sitting room. The kitchen and pantry area is located on the first floor in the back of the house. There are several unique built-in storage cupboards and drawers in the kitchen which would be fitting for storing a large quantity of goods. The oversized pantry has since been converted to a bathroom but it too would be reflective of the type of business that was operated out of the house and the need for a storage room. At the front of the house are two rooms which housed the store itself. Helen occupied this house until 1922.

Alonza & Maude Whitman occupied the house from 1922 to 1935. They sold the house to Mary Conklin in 1935 and she lived there until her death in May of 1940 when it was willed to her husband, Edward and their four children. Edward died just a few months later in October of 1940 and the estate then went to the children. In 1941, the siblings did a quitclaim deed and sold the house to their brother Maxwell Conklin and his wife Ruth for \$1.00. Maxwell was a physician and Ruth was a local teacher who had taught at School #2. Maxwell died suddenly in June 1943 leaving Ruth as the sole heir. Since she already had a home in Conklin, the house was sold to Dawn Benham. Dawn lived there from 1944 to 1966 at which time she sold it to the current owners, Donald and Beverly Osterhout.

Thank you to Bev for opening her home and sharing its history with me. If you have property along Main Street with a unique history, please feel free to contact me at [historian@townofkirkwood.org](mailto:historian@townofkirkwood.org). In the meantime, if you see me in my yellow vehicle driving slowly in this area, taking pictures and writing notes, just know I'm researching my next article.