

Then & Now on Main Street

284 Main Street

By: Karen Ferguson, Town Historian

This month's article is about a beloved building located at 284 Main Street. Depending on when you were born, this building is going to be remembered in different ways.

The one thing that is consistent with this building is that for more than 100 years the second story has always been an apartment. Until recently, the downstairs has always been some kind of commercial use.

W.E. (Wakeman) Samson owned and operated W.E. Samson's General Merchandise in this building from possibly 1918 (*since there is a foundation marker with that date*) until the late 1930s or early 40s. I am not sure how long the store was in operation, but I do know his wife, Dora, passed away in 1941 and he passed in 1945.

Elta Benjamin then took ownership of the building and it became the post office and a barber shop. He owned it from around 1950 (maybe earlier considering the date Samson passed) until 1970.

At that time, the property was purchased by his grandson, Jack Diffendorf and his wife Becky. They retained ownership until about 1990. During their time, many different businesses operated there, including a nail salon, an herb store, a ceramics studio, a craft store, and an arcade.

Cathy and Jerry Minoia purchased the building from the Diffendorf family in 1990 and they used it as an antique store.

In 2020, Cory and Holly Bond purchased the building and they have completely remodeled it and converted the first floor into a second residence. They have done a wonderful job of making it a beautiful apartment while keeping the integrity of the original structure. The tongue and groove walls remain, the porch is original, the front doors are original as well as the bell that still hangs on them. The cubby from the post office is intact and part of their laundry room now. There is an old door separating the laundry room and kitchen that they found in the basement and refinished. They kept the living room and kitchen open which allowed them to keep the large wooden support beams running down the center of the room exposed. Holly has done a fantastic job paying tribute to the building's past through her decorating style. For example, the General Store & Antique Sign that is above the kitchen cabinets is the one from Cathy & Jerry's business. On one wall hangs a post office sign, but it is not original to the

building. They salvaged beautiful shelving that used to be part of the front part of the antique store and turned it into a pantry area as part of the laundry room. The back two rooms that served as various shops are now bedrooms. Holly takes great pride in finding furniture to match the era while still making it cozy for guests. I would be remiss if I didn't give credit to Cory for his talented skills and craftsmanship of this incredible remodel. Great job to them both!

What I have not yet figured out but am continuing to discover is the exact age of the building. I was looking at plat maps from 1908 and 1876 and there appears to be a building in this same spot and noted as residences. Without having the official lot description from the deed it is hard to decipher if that is correct.

Now, here is a piece of trivia. This building is not the only W.E. Samson's General Merchandise store that operated on Main Street and will be the subject of a future article.

Lastly, one of the original store counters from Samson's store, a post office sign, and other memorabilia is located in the Kirkwood Historical Society Museum. Jack Diffendorf has the original store sign. He will be restoring it and donating it to the museum to hang above the counter.



Figure 1: Then - W.E. Samson's circa early 1900s



Figure 3: Then - Post Office & Barber Shop Circa 1960



Figure 2: Now - Two family residence 2025