

Then and Now on Main Street: 296 Main Street

By: Karen Ferguson, Town of Kirkwood Historian

This month's article is about another beloved store that used to be located at 296 Main Street. Depending on your age, the store will be remembered by different names: Samson's Store, Ellwood's Store, or Grover "Pop" Bennett's store.

Regardless of how you remember it though, it has been around long before it was any one of these stores. I was able to trace the deed all the way back to October 8, 1842, when Adam Hayes acquired it from Robert Hayes. Due to the fact that Robert had the property prior to Adam, it could be older. The property was originally part of the Thomas Patent 12-13.

Adam Hayes sold the property to the Kirkwood Wagon Company in 1884 described as Tract 2. The Kirkwood Wagon company already owned the adjacent property and it was referred to as Tract 1. On the deed it describes that Solon Conklin operated a store and one dwelling either on the property or on the boundary of said property of Tract 2. It is unknown if this is the same building. I've been told The Kirkwood Wagon Company did utilize this building for their use.

Tract 2 was then sold to George Berkalew & Julius Fish in 1895. I am assuming that is when Kirkwood Wagon Works went bankrupt necessitating the sale. In 1902 the property was under the ownership of Albert Wilson and others as Trustees of the Dairy Company. William & Mabel Roberts bought the store in 1903 and ran it until 1908. Wakeman & Dora Samson purchased the property and ran Samson's Store in this location from 1908-1912.

Interesting things to note on the deeds during this time span were the easements that were mentioned. George Berkalew was granted access to the creek for sewage. The Trustees of the Dairy Company had a clause that the property was subject to a lease to Obed Lawn's ending Dec. 1, 1907. Since the Roberts' Deed did not have the lease clause, it must have been voided. Mr. Samson's deed stated his well was on the premises of the June Dairy Co.

Frank Elwood purchased the property from Mr. Samson in 1912 and operated Elwood's general store until his death. His wife, Sarah Elwood, sold the property to Otis & Mildred Raper, Philip Raimoni, and Josephine Frank in 1948. A few months later the property was bought by Theodore Beagell who rented it out. During these years, the store was operated by Grover "Pop" Bennett until around 1954 when he relocated across the street in the old fire station. When he left, a cabinet maker occupied the space for about 3 years.

John Brown Sr. & Ruth Brown rented the upstairs apartment around 1950 and then moved downstairs about 1957 after the cabinet maker left. The Brown family eventually purchased the

property in 1960. I spoke with Greg Brown who reminisced about his time there. He was a small child when they moved in and “Pop” Bennett still had the store. He recalls that the family was very close to the cabinet maker and he had dinner upstairs with them on a regular basis. Greg said he was about 11 years old when they moved downstairs. He stated he spent a lot of time in the back room because that is where he built various model planes and/or cars. He recalled that the walls were interesting because of all the writing listing out who was dating whom. After his parents passed away, the children sold the house to Russell & Kathleen Shearing in 1991. In 1998 the house went into foreclosure and the following year was purchased by Diane Roberts-Pelligrino who leased out the two-family residence as it is today.

Diane was a fascinating individual. She was a retired Town of Kirkwood Justice, a member of the Broome County Magistrate Association and National Association of Women Judges, the owner of the RiverBoat Diana, President of the Pellegrino Marine Inc., among many other things. When Diane passed away, her close friend, Marilyn Fanto, inherited the property in 2019, eventually selling it to the current owner, Sejal 1 Corp, in 2024.



Figure 1 W.E. Samson Store



Figure 2 Frank Elwood's Store



Figure 2 Grover "Pop" Bennett's Store ca 1952



Figure 4 Now: 296 Main Street ca 2026