

BBBB BUILDING

(Broadhead-Barrett-Bud's-Blechas)



The changing landscape

Date of photo: 1935

By Barbara Mask

The tragedy of a historic building destroyed by fire recalls a history rich in commercial successes; architectural esthetics; and community sentiments. Grover Cleveland was President of the United States when the building(s) were constructed in 1885 and 1893. When the J. W. Broadhead Store reached its peak of success at the turn of the century, Theodore Roosevelt was President. Both the building and the country have experienced broad and sweeping changes.

EARLY HISTORY OF THE SITE

Hollis Chenery, the land agent for the original proprietors of Fulton, is the first name usually listed on local property deeds. So it is with this site of Block 5, Lot 10 on the southwest corner of Fourth Street (Main) and Tenth Avenue; Street and Cherry Street on early plat maps. Whiteside County Courthouse records reveal that the site was sold to Calvin Pease who operated a dry goods store there in 1865. In April, 1866, Editor G. J. Booth writes that the merchants were moving their stock out on the new wooden sidewalk in front of their stores. He chastised the owners because ladies

needed to walk in the street because even a "hoopless female couldn't wend her way through the groceries, barrels, and wares on the sidewalk." On August 10, 1866, merchant C. P. Pease advertises, "The ladies should remember, the place to buy the Silver hoop skirt is at Pease's Store." William M. Herrold and Cecil M. Church purchase the property on April 25, 1869 for \$3000 and they operated a dry goods store. Mr. Herrold owned the home at 707 Tenth Avenue (now the Fulton (Martin House Museum) and he and his wife lived there 1871-1884. Herrold then sold his home to the Bradstreet Robinsons; J. W. Broadhead's in-laws and owner of the Robinson House Hotel for thirty years. In 1867, Herrold and Church hired Jabez W. Broadhead, a local, young man, as a clerk in their store. He was seventeen years old. He is the sole owner by 1883. More information on J. W. Broadhead and his Store can be found in this article.



J.W. Broadhead Store 1890s

ADDITIONAL OWNERS

The business is sold and the building is leased to Edward Robbins in 1906 who operates a dry good business. Later, he takes a partner, Francis Hutson. The general merchandise store, Robbins-Hutson, was sold to W.H. Vaupel of Clinton in 1925 who owned it for one year; then Wyne-Deaver & Company owned it for another year. George A. Walter purchased the building from Alice Robinson Broadhead on November 9, 1928. He rented the south section of the building to Mrs. Alydia Reimers who used it as a drug store for a brief period of time. Walters owned the property until 1955 and operated the Fulton Electric Store in the south section (1002) when the drug store moved to 1008 Fourth Street. Eugene Barrett ran a meat market in the south building from 1937-1947. Elmer (Bud) Reckard, who worked for Barrett's Meat Market, purchased the business and the building at 1002 on September 4, 1947 at 27 years of age. He bought 1000 Fourth Street in 1955 from George A. Walter and removed the wall between the two buildings.

Bud's Market became known as Bud's IGA and, later, as Bud's Foodliner. The grocery store closed in 2000 when Bud died. (See other information on Bud Reckard and his Store in this article).

The Corner Building was idle for several years. It was purchased by Bill and Pam Leavens Blecha in 2006. Extensive remodeling of the first and second floors enhanced the appearance and created a commercial enterprise anew to the site. At the time of the November 23, 2010 fire, the Fulton Commerce Center was the site of Wagner Pharmacy, Heartland Hospice, Pictoria Art Gallery, and the owner's office. There were four apartments on the upper level which were all rented. Pam and Bill have been diligent in removing the rubble and hope to rebuild at the site.

THE BUILDING

The building was pressed-brick veneer and was constructed at two different times. The southern half was erected in 1885 on a vacant lot. There was a two-story, wooden-frame building on the north lot which was moved to an unrecorded site farther west on Cherry Street (Tenth Avenue). The north half of the building was erected in 1893.

The completed store had high ceilings on the first floor and there was a balcony (often called a mezzanine) running along the rear and south side of the building. The roof line was crowned mid-cornice with a gable structure that, in some early photos, included a half moon divided glass insert. There were curved-glass windows at the second story level on the north and east sides of the corner. A turret projected grandly from the northeast corner—with a cone-topped roof. A flame-shaped finial ornamented its peak. The edifice and roof line were the building's most attractive features; stately and prominent from every direction. This writer recalls looking directly at the turret during my Ferris-Wheel ride at the Fall Festival in the early 1950s. On the first swing upward, our seat stopped at the top. That was scary, but the turret looked awesome up close! It was remembered fondly until it was removed by Bud Reckard (for safety concerns) at an unknown date sometime in the 1960s.

THE BROADHEAD STORE

Jabez W. Broadhead was born in Fulton. His father, James Broadhead, was a blacksmith. According to his daughter, Sylvia's Memoir, he was a devoted husband and father. Her detailed writings about growing up in Fulton have provided insights into her family, but also a valuable look at our town a century ago. Broadhead was a successful business man and the J. W. Broadhead Store was a bustling enterprise.

John (Jack) E. Reagan and Nellie Wilson

President Ronald Reagan's father, Jack, worked in the Broadhead Store as a shoe salesman in the early 1900s. It was a career that he continued to pursue in his adult life, moving his family to many cities, always looking for that 'dream' job. Nellie Clyde Wilson also clerked in the store as did Jack's sister, Catherine, who recommended him for a job in the shoe department. Nellie and Jack marry in Fulton on November 8, 1904 in the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church Rectory. In the Fulton Journal, dated January 26, 1923, "John (Jack) Reagan of Dixon motored to Fulton with Henry Pitney to look over the shoe stock owned until lately by the Dykhuis Shoe Store with a view of purchasing the same. But the goods had been sold two weeks ago to A. S. Chapman. Mr. Pitney for many years was a successful business man in Tampico and a few years ago sold out and now has an exclusive shoe store in Dixon. Mr. Reagan was born in Fulton, and for a long time was employed in the J. W. Broadhead Store, now Robbins-Hutson Co.



Warner Jewelry Store 1929 - Edith (Walters) Robinson
Note the reflection of College Building in the background.



American Express Store

After leaving Fulton (in 1906), he was chief clerk for Mr. Pitney in Tampico and now has charge of the Dixon shoe store.”

A Fulton Journal article on January 5, 1906 describes the ‘remarkable sale’ when the Broadheads move to Colorado to open two stores there. “There has been something extraordinary doing in a business way at the Broadhead Store of the great closing out sale of the immense stock of merchandise. People came in great numbers and the various departments of the big double store were thronged, packed, jammed full of people. It was the biggest mercantile day ever known in town. The sales broke the record of the big day (Saturday before Christmas) when cash sales were over \$1,000. The force of clerks had been increased to twenty-four and every one was busy from morning till night.” It is interesting to note that when more snow arrived in that January of 1906, the customer base increased. “Thursday was a repetition, only as the snow had allowed sleighing, the number from a great distance was increased. There were people from twenty miles away here shopping laden with big bundles of purchases.” The merchandise offered at the Broadhead Store reminds one of the large department stores in Europe that sell a broad spectrum of items: boots; groceries; bedding; clothes; and tailor-made suits and jackets.

(See advertisement in this article).

There have been several fires in Fulton’s downtown business district that have caused disastrous results. The DeBey fire in 1877 has similarities to the 2010 one in regard to community responsiveness which prevented additional devastation. The DeBey building was located where the current parking lot is north of the Broadhead/Blecha Building. The fire threatened the building. Bucket brigades carried water four blocks from the river; residents soaked blankets and carpets and spread them over the building in an attempt to save the structure. The Broadhead building and the one north where the former fire station now stands were keys to controlling the fire which would have spread through the downtown area. The BBBB building was saved by a massive community effort and while the outcome was not the same in 2010, the effort was.

ROBBINS-HUTSON CO.

Edward Robbins & Co. purchased the business in 1906, but not the building. He continued the dry goods store, however, groceries were no longer offered. He makes numerous changes in the store. A lengthy account of those changes is stated in the February 26, 1907 Journal article. “The ladies’ shoe department is now on the west balcony and is roomy, well-lighted and complete in every detail as to convenience and for displaying goods in this line. The walls and ceiling of the room on the third floor have been calcimined in an attractive pink color, and a new special line of goods will be opened up and displayed there within a few days.” This was interesting to learn because it confirms that shopping was available on other levels in the store. On June 17, 1919, the Fulton Journal announces that the business change is in name only and will become Robbins-Hutson Co. The article praised Mr. Hutson as a salesman, “genial, gifted with good address and at one has gained and retained the confidence of the patrons of the store. His friends are pleased that he has received deserved recognition in the change of the firm name.” The company was in business on the corner for 20 years. Many offices were rented on the second-floor level and are listed in a separate section.



Fulton Electric Store 1926 - Edith Walters and G.F. Walters (sonny) - Items of interest in photo are a variety of light bulbs, electric washing machine, electric range, G.E. fan, changing light fixture.

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We have just returned from market with a carefully selected stock of

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 We can please you with
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 For the good things to eat.

**OUR
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 Stock is complete, and we will
 make you special low prices to
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J. W. Broadhead & Co.
 Dealers in the best of
 everything to wear or to eat

THE WALTERS BUILDING

George A. Walters purchased the building from Alice Robinson Broadhead in 1929. Businesses on the street level included the Fulton Electric Store which was owned by George Walters. Warner Jewelry Store, American Express Office, Barrett’s Meat Market and Smaltz Brothers Plumbing were additional businesses located at 1000 and 1002 Fourth Street during the 30s and 40s and until 1955

when Walters sells the building to Bud Reckard. There are no interior photos of the Broadhead or Robbins-Hutson Store at the Fulton (Martin House) Museum, but there are interior pictures when Walters owned the building, which were donated to the Fulton Historical Society from the Walters Estate. Rooms in the upper level of the Walter's building were rented by the Honolulu Conservatory of Music. Many Fulton residents took lessons there and presented a Hawaiian Revue at the Fulton Community Coliseum. Twenty-one students from Fulton had a role in the Revue. Beverly Hoese and Marjoire Boelkens had a solo numbers.

BUD'S IGA

The owner that most of Fulton citizens knew personally was Elmer (Bud) Reckard. He was a genial, generous, and community-minded business owner and Fulton is/was enriched because he chose to be a local business man. Bud's skills as a meat cutter, preserver and purveyor were a special talent. Many people traveled a distance to shop at the Broadhead Store and so it was with Bud's IGA for his homemade metwurst, bologna, liver sausage, corned beef, meatloaf. He also dressed out his own veal, beef and pork. His meat market roasted turkeys and hams and chicken in the store. Dolores Swemline Daley, Bud's sister who worked in his store for many years, recalls a time when they purchased live chickens from Wayne Bastian's farm and processed them. It must have been a memorable activity as Dee Menz, Bud's stepdaughter, can also recall the whole 'ordeal.' In an interview on November 28, 1998 in the Quad-City Times, Bud told about the 'oleo' craze. "We were the first to have colored oleo. Iowa did not have it yet and people came from all over to get it. We sold a ton a week. It was three pounds for \$1.00. He said that they had so much oleo they didn't have a place for all of it. We had to set it in front of the meat counter to try and keep it cold." Bud married Helen Ferguson in 1954. She and her two daughters, Dee and Donna, and Bud lived in an apartment above the store. Bud had the longest tenure of ownership of the corner building at fifty-three years. He is remembered for his generosity with gifts of meat during difficult times.

THE BLECHA BUILDING FULTON COMMERCE CENTER

Purchased in 2006, the Blechas would win the award for most improved in appearance. The plate glass windows that were installed in 1916 by Edward Robbins were replaced and the interior on the first and second levels were remodeled and transformed. The building, often referred to as the flagship of the downtown district, now looked like one!

This writer has always loved the building: its structure, history, location, and the unique architectural features. Today, while sitting at the 4-way Stop sign, it looked to me like Main Street had lost its two-front teeth. There is comfort in knowing that they will be replaced.