

“A Tour of Places No Longer There”

The Parking Lots of Winchester



Harry G. Enoch

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Introduction

This parking lot tour, which focuses on some of Winchester's lost treasures, was written during National Historic Preservation Month.* The inspiration came from a Tom Eblen column in the *Lexington Herald-Leader* entitled "A tour of places no longer there" about downtown Lexington buildings that have been lost.† Several of the places are now parking lots. At the most famous of these, on the corner of Second Street and Mill, stood the Thomas Hart House, father-in-law of Henry Clay, built in 1798. Later residents included John Bradford, Kentucky's first newspaper publisher; Confederate General John Hunt Morgan; and Cassius Clay's daughter, Laura. Public outrage when the house was razed for a parking lot in 1955 led to formation of the Blue Grass Trust for Historic Preservation.

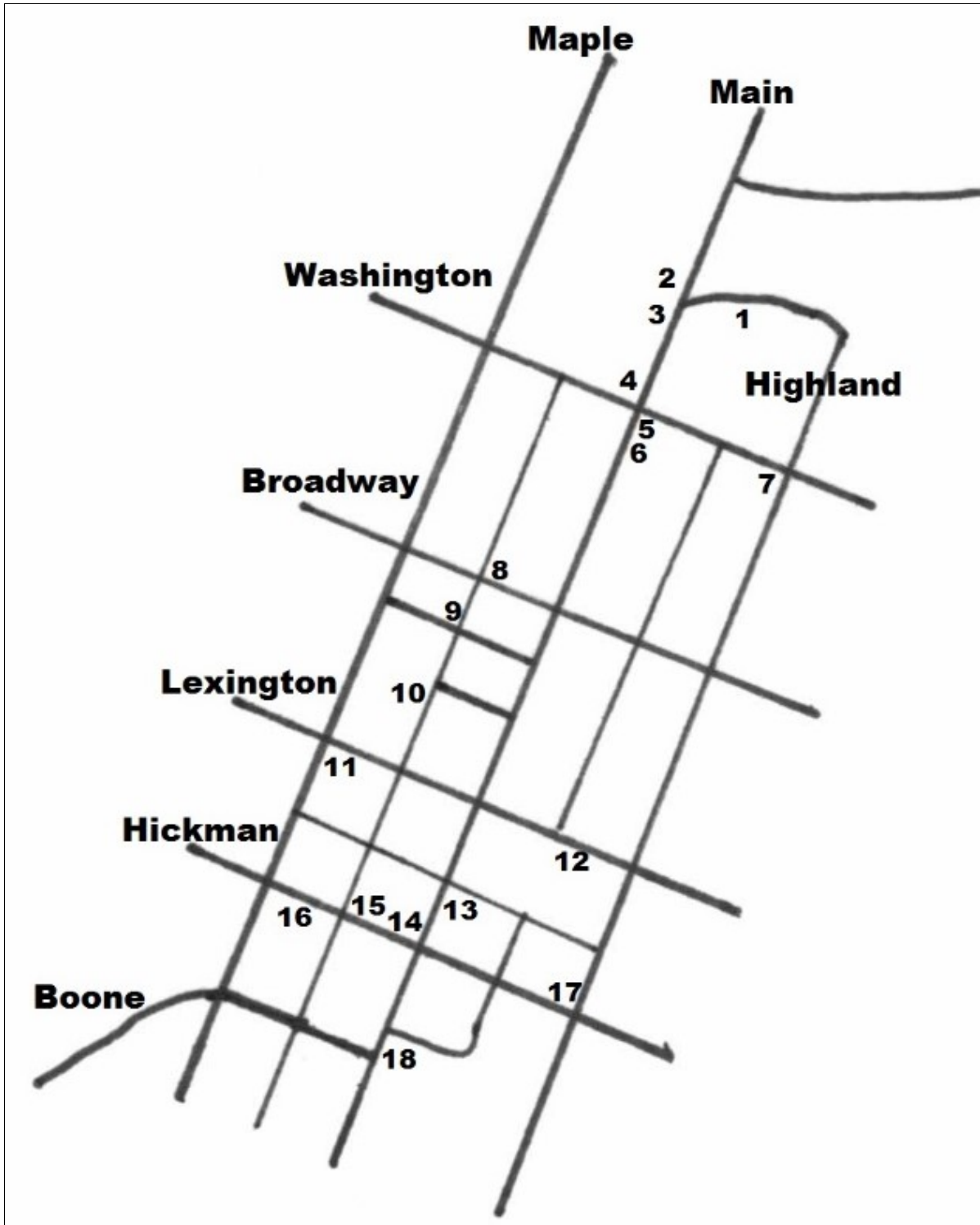
As you walk around Winchester, you will notice we many parking lots, drive-thru lanes and other paved areas downtown. Some of these were once occupied by architecturally significant or historically important homes and businesses. Some of the structures simply outlived their usefulness and could not be economically repurposed. Other buildings, however, fell victim to neglect as owners failed to provide needed structural maintenance. Then there were perfectly good buildings razed for parking lots.

I thought it might be of interest to identify the buildings that once stood on these asphalt strips. Since there is nothing to see at these sites now except pavement, I have only included buildings for which we have pictures. The accompanying map has 18 sites and a picture to go with each.

* The "tour" is drawn from a series of articles that appeared in the *Winchester Sun* (May 13, 20, 27 and June 3, 2016).

† *Lexington Herald-Leader*, April 7, 2016.

Parking Lot Map



Key to Map

- 1. C&O and L&N Passenger Depot**
- 2. Jones & Gay Warehouse**
- 3. G. L. Wainscott Bottling House**
- 4. St. George Hotel**
- 5. J. W. Hollar's Grocery**
- 6. Dr. O. R. Venable's Office**
- 7. Washington Street School**
- 8. Broadway Grocery**
- 9. Central Kentucky Natural Gas Co.**
- 10. Clark County Jail**
- 11. Fairfax Church of Christ**
- 12. M. G. Taylor House**
- 13. First Presbyterian Church**
- 14. Coulter House**
- 15. Emmanuel Episcopal Church**
- 16. Capt. John Tramel House**
- 17. Hickman Street School**
- 18. V. W. Bush House**

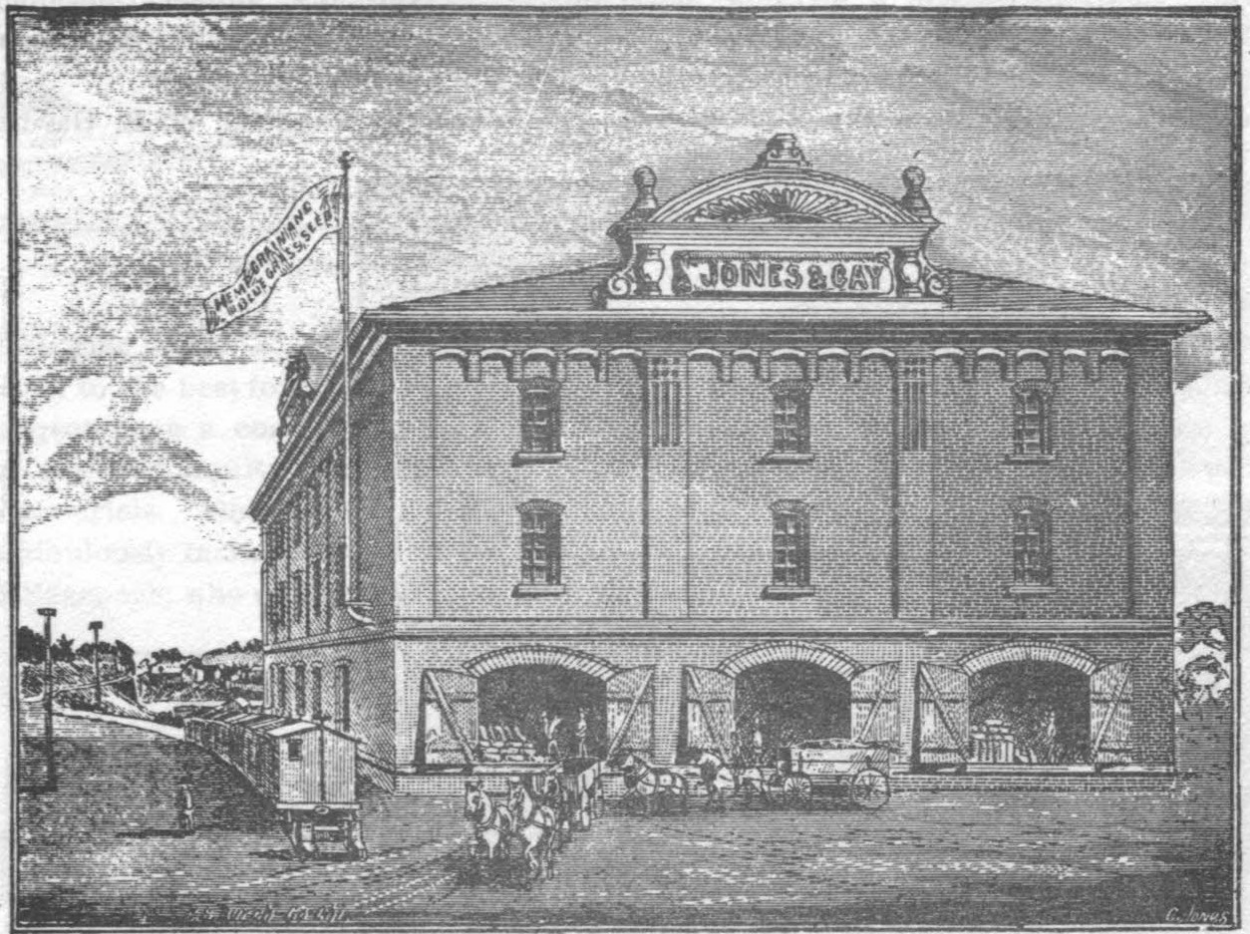
1. C&O and L&N Passenger Depot



The building that caused the greatest uproar in Winchester when it was razed was the old railroad station on Depot Street. The depot was built in 1907 as a joint passenger station for the C&O and L&N railroads. The Kentucky Heritage Commission declared that the station “is one of the richest and most authentic in detail in addition to being the earliest of its type in Kentucky.” By 1981, the old depot sat unused, and the city was negotiating with L&N officials about acquiring the building. A developer had expressed interest in converting the station to a restaurant. The front page story in the *Winchester Sun* for Monday, July 27, 1981, reported that “an L&N crew, beginning before daylight on a foggy Saturday morning, leveled the building.” The depot was destroyed without notice and “came as a complete surprise to citizens and officials alike.”



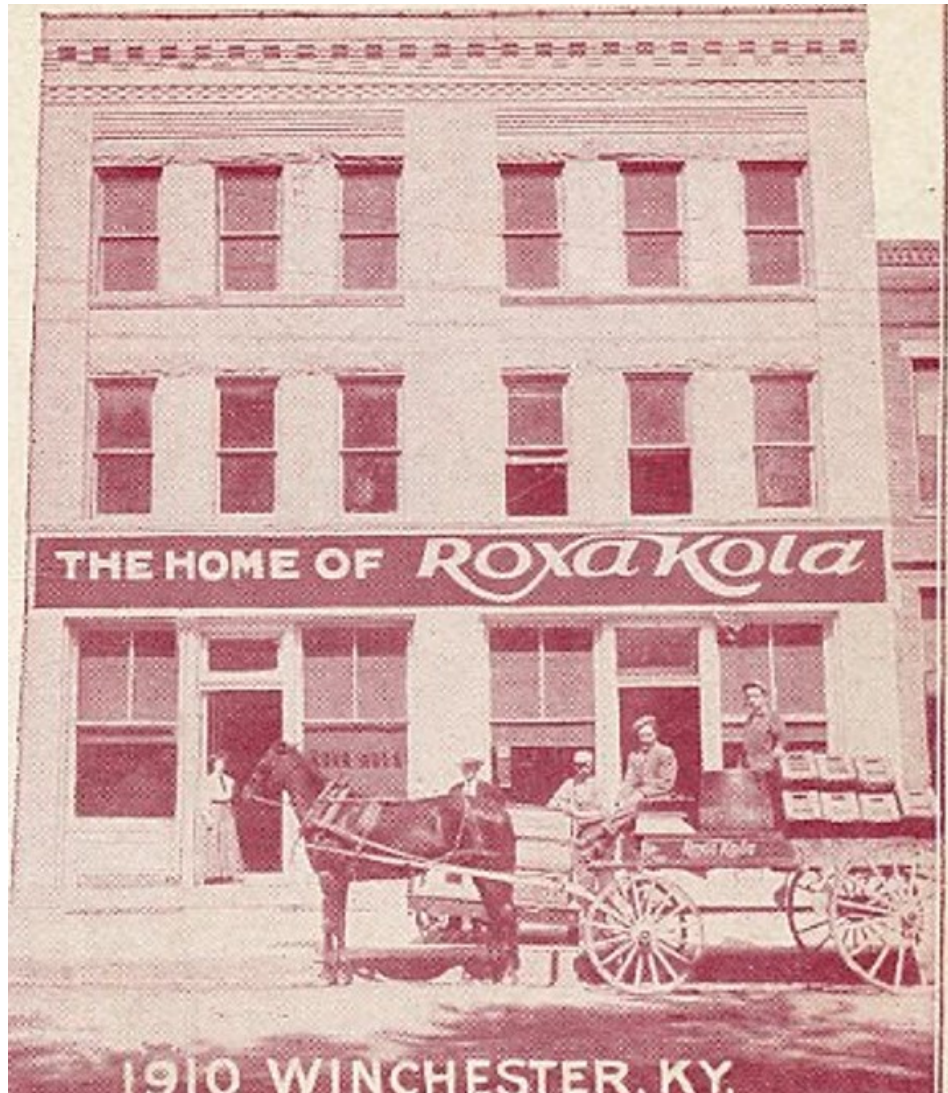
2. Jones & Gay Warehouse



This warehouse stood on Main Street on a siding of the Newport News and Mississippi Valley Railway (later the C&O Railroad) in 1886. The facility stored hemp seed, bluegrass seed and grain (capacity of 80,000 bushels) and was also equipped for cleaning seed. Possibly due to a fire, the warehouse was rebuilt in 1887. W. M. Jones and David S. Gay were proprietors of the three-story brick warehouse shown above (1889). "Jones & Gay have a very complete warehouse for storage of hemp, wheat and other produce. They have connected with their establishment a hackling house where their hemp is cleaned and prepared for market. They do an immense business." The warehouse burned in 1905 destroying the machinery and \$15,000 worth of bluegrass seed.

David S. Gay lived on an estate on Lexington Road. His lovely home on the place, Breeze Hill, was razed several years ago.

3. G. L. Wainscott Bottling House



In 1899, G. Lee Wainscott purchased a storehouse and lot on Main Street, just south of the C & O Railroad. Here in 1902 Wainscott started making candy and bottling soda water. He soon introduced a number of fruit-flavored drinks. In 1906, he began bottling and selling Roxa Kola, supposedly named after his first wife Roxanne. After the drink became popular in the area, Wainscott started selling syrup to other bottlers. There were Roxa Kola plants in Lexington, Irvine, Beattyville, Georgetown, Cynthiana and Carlisle, each with their own licensed territory. Wainscott achieved his greatest success marketing another soft drink, Ale-8-One, launched in 1926. In 1935 he moved his factory to a two-story brick building on Broadway. This flourishing local business, owned and operated by the Rogers family, now has a modern bottling plant on Carol Road.

4. St. George Hotel



When it opened on the evening of February 3, 1904, the St. George Hotel was proclaimed "the finest hotel in Winchester." Just one block from the train station, the St. George prospered from the growing number of railroad travelers coming through Winchester at that time. Ground floor businesses included a drugstore, café, billiard parlor, barber shop, cigar stand, and bar.

The St. George was remodeled and renovated numerous times. In later years, however, it was allowed to deteriorate and became quite run down. The end finally came on June 26, 1987, when the handsome old hotel was torn down to make room for the new post office building.



5. J. W. Hollar's Grocery

6. Dr. O. R. Venable's Office



A pair of buildings stood at Main and Washington where Dairy Queen is located now. This corner was occupied by physicians beginning at least by 1877, when Dr. Edward M. Combs had his office and residence here. Doctor Combs got his degree from Transylvania Medical College. He died in 1893. Dr. O. R. Venable had his practice here from 1889 until his death in 1920. Doctor Venable, a native of Georgia with a medical degree from the University of Michigan, kept his office in the building on the right in the picture. The building on the left was Hollar's Grocery.

J. W. Hollar came to Winchester from Nicholas County in 1889 and opened a grocery on this corner five years later. After his death in 1936, his son William and two spinster daughters, Cora and Klein, carried on the business until 1968, making Hollar's an institution on North Main for nearly 75 years. According to the late Kathryn Owen, the building had been erected in 1812, placing it among the oldest in the city. Her scrapbooks contain a number of photos and articles about the grocery.

7. Washington Street School



The Washington Street School, built in 1892, was Winchester's second public school (Hickman Street School was the first). Just after midnight on March 11, 1923, a tornado roared through Clark County and Winchester. Described at the time as "the worst windstorm in history," the tornado badly damaged the school. "Virtually the entire south side of the building was destroyed," and the structure had to be demolished.

8. The Broadway Grocery



In some cases, a structure's deteriorated condition contributed to its becoming a candidate for the wrecking ball. That appears to have been the case for the Broadway Grocery. This handsome three-story brick building at the northeast corner of Broadway and Wall Alley was put up between 1886 and 1890. The ground floor held two commercial spaces, 17 and 19 West Broadway, and the upstairs was used for residences. City directories indicate that a grocery occupied one side of the ground floor until after World War II. Samuel E. Pruitt operated the Broadway Grocery from 1895 to 1911 and perhaps longer. He was followed by John G. Parrish, A. C. Green and Ura A. Haggard, the last, in 1947.

The building housed a liquor dispensary for three decades and then a beauty salon. The building was vacant in 2009. The following year, the county purchased the property and razed the building for a parking lot.

9. Central Kentucky Natural Gas Co.



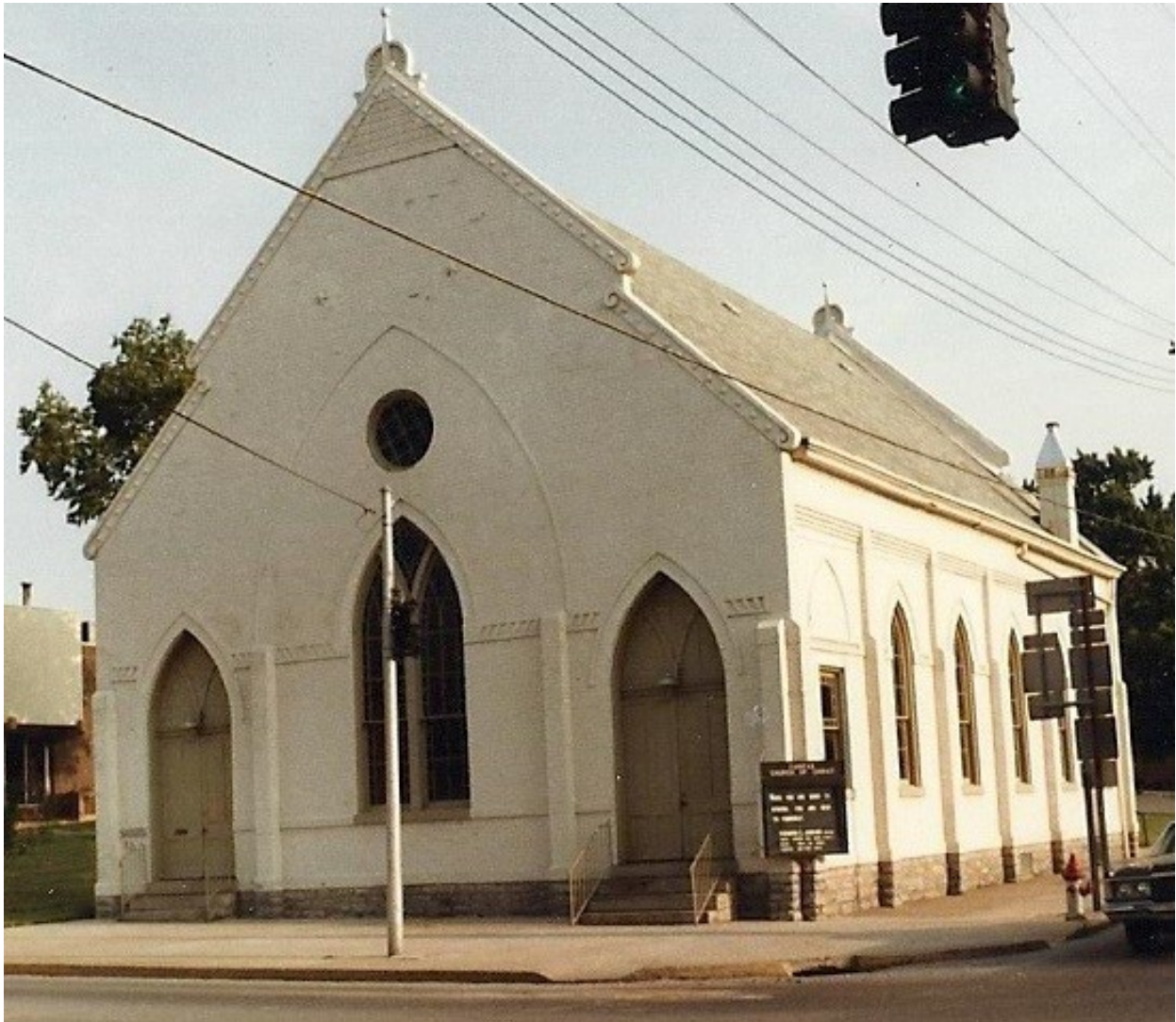
The building at the northwest corner of Wall and Cleveland was erected before 1886. City directories indicate that the Central Kentucky Natural Gas Company occupied this building from 1907 through 1958. The company, incorporated in 1905, serviced customers in Central Kentucky from their natural gas fields in Menifee and surrounding counties. The fields were exhausted by 1919, and the company began bringing gas in from distant sources and storing it in their vacated reservoirs. By 1963 the company offices had moved to 123 West Lexington Avenue, at which time they were known as Columbia Gas of Kentucky.

10. Clark County Jail



The old jail was torn down in 1993 after the new Clark County Detention Center was built. The Clark County Jail was a house-like structure erected in 1912 at a cost of \$22,000. The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In order to meet stringent new standards for jails, a new facility—the \$4.6 million Clark County Detention Center—was opened in 1992. The Fiscal Court looked for ways to preserve the old building, but renovation proved to be impractical, and it was torn down in 1993 to provide a parking lot for City Hall.

11. Fairfax Church of Christ



In 1887, J. W. Harding and fifteen members of the Court Street Christian Church left the congregation in protest over the introduction of musical instruments. The group formed a new congregation, and in 1891 they erected a building—Fairfax Church of Christ—at the corner of Maple and Fairfax Street (now Lexington Avenue). The growing congregation purchased a lot on Boonesboro Road for a new building, which they moved to in 1984. The old church was sold to Clark County Bank and razed. Part of the lot now serves as parking for Kentucky Bank.

12. M. G. Taylor House



This old house sat on two town lots purchased by Dr. John Irwin in 1810 and 1812, respectfully. Doctor Irwin, an army surgeon, died in the massacre at River Raisin during the War of 1812. When Irwin's heirs sold the property in 1828, it was described as "having thereon a large brick building & other buildings and at present occupied by Thomas F. Harrow." Thus, the house must have been built by the Irwin family sometime between 1812 and 1828.

Succeeding owners were Harrow, Walter Preston, Alexander M. Preston (married Doctor Irwin's daughter Elizabeth), Henry Grant, Thomas H. Moore, and Mrs. Ann Poston. Mrs. Mary Laura Taylor purchased the house in 1870.

Mary Laura's husband, Martin Gibson Taylor, was a grandson of Clark County's pioneer leader, Hubbard Taylor. After her husband died in 1887, Mary Laura placed the following notice in the newspaper: "I will sell privately my brick residence on East Fairfax Street containing ten rooms and kitchen, brick stable, ice house, and all necessary outbuildings. Cistern and well in yard, large garden, etc. This is without doubt one of the most attractive and desirable residences in Winchester."

The large home would be added onto and used as a school—Winchester Female College—and boarding house for many years. The First Baptist Church purchased the house and demolished it to make a parking lot in 1979.

13. First Presbyterian Church



The First Presbyterian Church in Winchester, organized in 1813, has met in five different locations beginning with the old Winchester Academy on Hickman Street. They built a church at 245 South Main, then moved two blocks north to a new building that later served as the Clark County Public Library. In 1893, they built the lovely church (*above*) at 121 South Main that burned in May 1972. After they moved to their new building on Windridge Drive in 1975, the old church was razed. It now serves as a parking lot for Tom Goebel & Co.

14. Coulter House



One of Kathryn Owen's scrapbooks has this photograph of a building she called the Coulter House constructed in about 1816. The builder, Joseph Coulter, a Winchester merchant, purchased a lot of ground from Philip B. Winn in 1811 for \$260. The lot, which was outside the town boundaries at that time, began 100 feet from what is now Ogden Alley. Coulter sold the lot to John W. Hinde in 1816 for \$3050. The price differential indicates Coulter made significant improvements on his lot. While his deed to Hinde does not mention a house, a subsequent deed—James H. Reed to Theodore Kohlhas—states that this is “the same house and Lott conveyed to Reed by John W. Hinde.” A deed from Kohlhas to Marcella Bean in 1864 further describes the property as a “Brick house and lot of ground.” Winchester Bank purchased the lot in 1976 and razed the house to make room for additional drive-thru lanes.

15. Emmanuel Episcopal Church



Francis H. Dudley donated a lot at the northeast corner of Wall Alley and Hickman Street where Emmanuel Episcopal Church erected their first edifice, which opened in May 1888. The parish was almost lost in the 1950s due to financial woes but recovered after receiving an endowment from the estate of Susan Miller Bush. In 1967 construction began on a new building on Lexington Road. Services there began on Christmas Eve of that year.

The old church building was used by another congregation for a time. The site now serves as a parking lot for Community Trust Bank.

16. Capt. John Tramel House



The Captain John Tramel House on West Hickman Street was demolished in 2004, in spite of preservationists' efforts to save it. The two-story brick Federal-style residence was erected in 1834. Captain Tramel ran a grocery on Main Street and was commander of the Winchester Light Infantry. In 1832, his company escorted President Andrew Jackson from Colbyville Tavern to a celebration and dinner in Winchester. Tramel deeded the house to his children, and the property remained in the family until 1873, after which it passed through a series of owners, one of whom was William J. Lampton, the prominent author who called himself "Plain Poet of the People." Later owners put up a two-story brick addition on the south side of the house and performed extensive renovations. The last owner was the First United Methodist Church of Winchester.

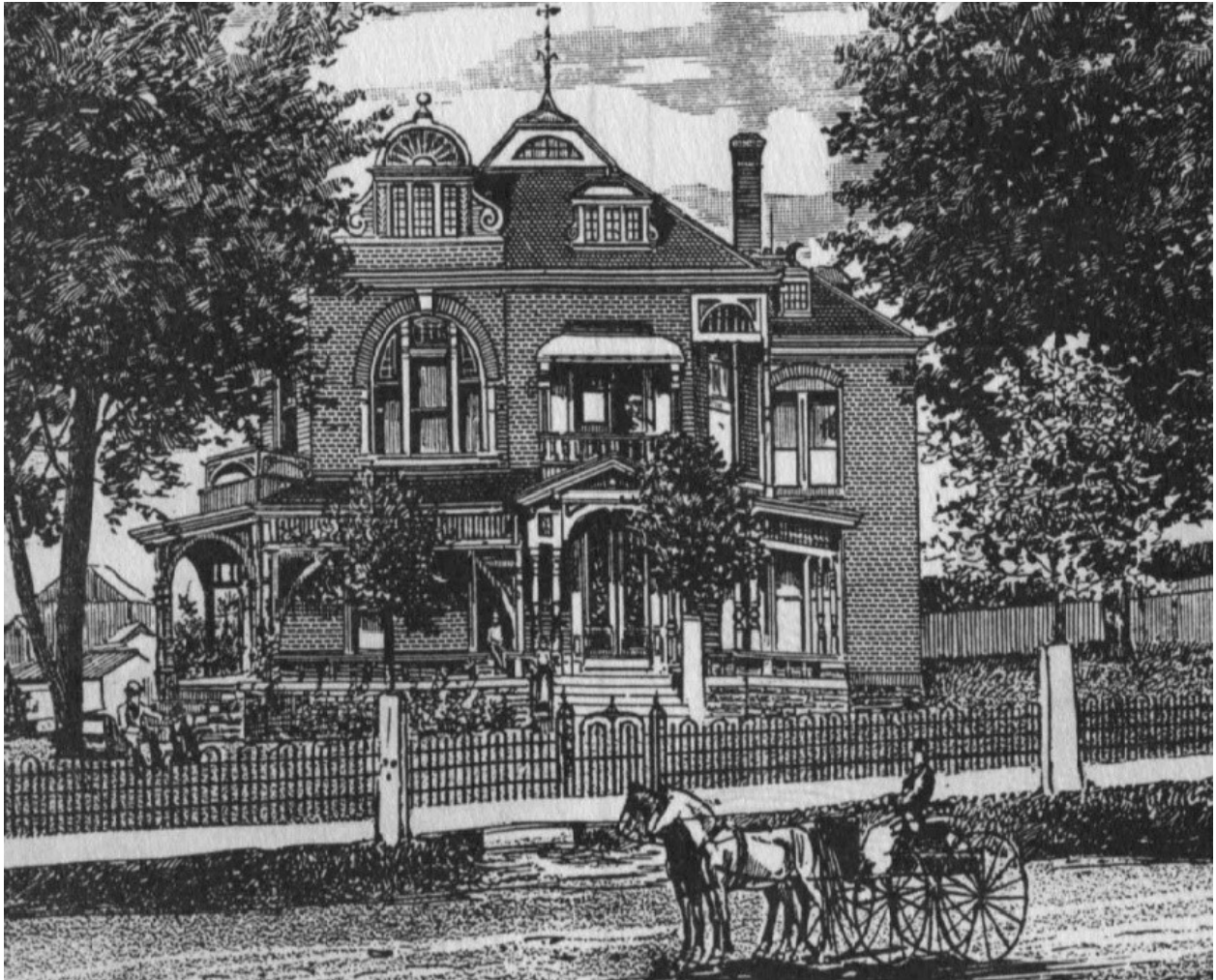
17. Hickman Street School



Another Winchester icon was lost when Hickman Street School was razed after more than 80 years of service. The school stood on the site of the county's first educational institution, the Winchester Academy, incorporated in 1798. The old building was replaced by the six-room Hickman Street School in 1890. Ten more rooms and a gymnasium were eventually added. Elementary classes were held on the first floor; high school students attended on the second floor. Integration and consolidation brought many changes and several new schools. When Shearer Elementary School opened in the fall of 1972, the Hickman Street facility stood vacant. In February 1974 the old school was demolished.



18. V. W. Bush House



This “charming home of V. W. Bush” appeared in the Winchester Handbook of 1889. Valentine White Bush was a grandson of Ambrose Bush, Capt. Billy Bush’s brother. V. W., a prominent Winchester businessman, erected one of the city’s iconic buildings, the V. W. Bush Warehouse, known today as the “Sphar Building.” His Main Street residence was purchased in 1884 in the name of Kate Hampton Bush, his third wife. Deeds referring to this house go back at least to 1838, when James H. Reed sold to William C. Sympson. Successive owners were Henry Grant, Thomas H. Moore, A. D. Rash—shown living there on an 1877 Winchester map—Mrs. Mary Oder, and Mrs. Kate Bush. V. W. died in 1900, Kate in 1927. Her will left the house to her son V. W. Jr. In 1942 he gave the house to his sisters, Clara and Wilma, as “a Christmas present.” The house was razed in the 1970s, and the lot now serves as a parking area for the Bluegrass Heritage Museum.

Afterword

Our community's history and heritage has been shaped by many factors—the people who lived here; the events, large and small, that brought us where we are today; and the written record by which we can trace the path. That heritage also includes our buildings—public, commercial and residential—that stand as examples of architectural value or scenes of historical events. It might be said that buildings provide the most visible link with our past. Over the course, of a century or two a city must change and adapt with the times, and every old building cannot be saved. But senseless destruction, whether by neglect or for “progress,” can have unintended consequences. The community stands to lose the soul of its heritage and history. When that happens, the very character of the community, those intrinsic and intangible values that make Winchester a special place to live, will be placed at risk.

Acknowledgements

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