

# Ashland's Early Grocery Stores

By Lori Adams

In the late 1800's and early 1900's, you could say that Ashland was having its first version of "Ashland on the Rise." As the population increased, so did the need for products and services. The downtown area was booming with all types of businesses to meet the needs of its citizens. One of those needs was for food markets.

The earliest memories of grocery stores in Ashland are of buildings with pot belly stoves and men gathered around playing checkers. The floors were stained of tobacco juice that missed the spittoon. Some markets had what was called a "liar's bench" out front where men could sit in the summertime and try to tell the biggest fibs.

One of the early markets was located at 113 Main Street in 1885. The wholesale and retail grocery store was owned and operated by W.C. Moore and J.T. Reaser. In 1906, Moore started his own store at 143 Main Street. His son, M.K. Moore, joined him in 1917, and they became very well-known for fresh and fancy groceries, fruits, and vegetables.



The Moore & Reaser Grocery Store was located at 113 Main Street and was one of the first grocery stores located downtown

Grocery store workers worked long hours, often from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m., six days a week, but they were always closed on Sundays. Cats were sometimes used as mousers to keep rodents away from products.

The stores had no grocery carts, aisle displays, or checkout counters. They didn't offer coupon deals but did sometimes host guessing game contests with jars of beans.



Baskets of fresh produce and a large bunch of bananas were for sale in 1896 at the C.W. Landis Store located at 95 Main Street

Owners and clerks wore long, white aprons and used a long pole or sliding ladder to pick things from the shelves. They often took telephone orders, ran charge accounts, and made deliveries. Clerks would also clean the oil lamps and crush the "soft" sugar to make it more desirable for sale. Butter was stored in the cool basement, and clerks would cut and weigh the amount customers wanted.

The first "cash only" grocery store in Ashland was located at the corner of Orange and Third Streets. The Firestone Brothers, O.D. and his brother Clark, opened the store in 1912 and did not extend any credit to customers. They eventually locked their doors in 1932 when competition from the Kroger Grocery and Baking Company moved into town.

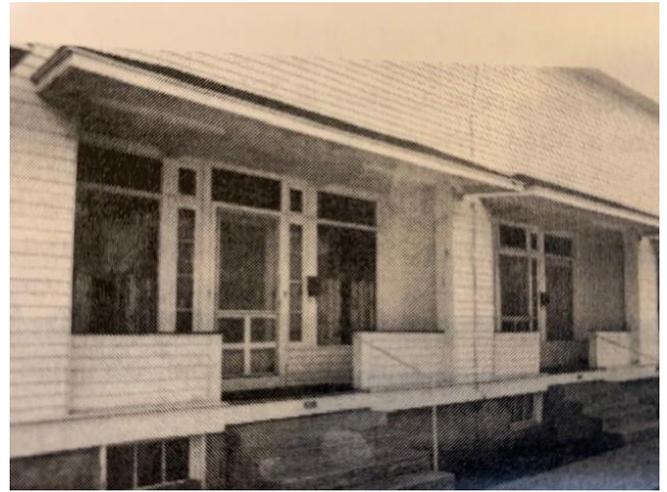
## ASHLAND'S EARLY GROCERY STORES

Candy, loose tea, and other staples were contained in large bulk tin containers and lined the counters. Bunches of bananas often hung in store windows, and brass scales were used to weigh food items. Farmers often traded butter and eggs in exchange for other grocery items. Items such as crackers, dried fish (blind robins), flour and sugar came in barrels since packaging did not yet exist. Oats and hay for horses were also available for sale.

In the early years, peas and tomatoes were the only canned goods available. When corn and peaches first became available in cans, the canned corn would often explode on the shelves. After branding was established and trade names became more common, the quality of the canned fruits and vegetables improved.

The neighborhood grocer knew all his customers and their children by name. Children often visited to buy candy or baseball cards. Few women worked in those days, so traveling to the store was a way to get out of the house with the children and take a buggy ride to the store to stock up on supplies.

Over the years as the city grew larger, neighborhood grocery stores became commonplace in addition to the downtown stores. Neighborhood stores were often located in houses. Many market owners lived in their home and set aside the downstairs or a particular area to sell grocery items.



Neighborhood markets located within homes became popular as Ashland grew larger in the 1900's. This market was located at 205 Arthur Street.

By 1939, there were 28 grocery stores listed in the city directory, but only eight were located downtown. Neighborhood grocers were listed on East and West Liberty Streets, Eastern Avenue, Cleveland Avenue, Miller Street, and Orange Road. Other locations were on Union Street, Ninth Street, Claremont Avenue, Cottage Street, Orange Street, Elm Street, Vine Street, and West Main Street.

Names associated with grocery stores in Ashland over the years were Landis, Brubaker, Heltman, Zehner, Livingston, and Sponsler to name only a few.



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