

Walks through History
McCrary Commercial Historic District
Begin at Raney Park, 2nd & Jackson streets in McCrary
July 19, 2014
By: Rachel Silva



Intro

Good morning, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Thank you for coming, and welcome to the “Walks through History” tour of downtown McCrary! I’d like to thank Mayor Doyle Fowler, Kip Davis, and Paula Barnett for their help with the tour. And thanks to the Mayor, we will have refreshments in the old Fake’s Mercantile Building (now the civic center) during the tour.

For any architects in the audience, this tour is worth 2 hours of HSW continuing education credit through the American Institute of Architects. See me after the tour if you’re interested.

The McCrary Commercial Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2010 for its association with the commercial development of McCrary and its early 20th century commercial-style architecture. The district includes about 3 blocks on Edmonds Avenue between 3rd Street and the railroad tracks, and comes over to include the 100 block of E. 2nd Street as well.

Brief History of McCrory

Woodruff County was established in 1862 (and re-approved in 1865 after the Civil War). The county was named for William Woodruff, founder and editor of the *Arkansas Gazette*. During the early-to-mid-19th century, a small settlement known as Jennie's Colony was located near present-day McCrory. There are a few different stories explaining the origin of the name "Jennie's Colony." One story states that a traveler was coming through the area about 1840 and stopped at a cabin to ask directions. A woman named Jennie answered the door and was surrounded by children of all sizes. The traveler later joked that he had gotten directions at "Jennie's Colony," referring to the large number of children in Jennie's home, and the name stuck. Another story states that Jennie's Colony was named for early settler Jennie Edmonds, which suggests a connection to the naming of Edmonds Avenue in McCrory. Yet another story associates Jennie's Colony with Jennie Barnes, whose husband was an early settler in the area. Regardless of which story you believe, part of Jennie's Colony later became the town of McCrory.

McCrory traces its beginnings to 1862, when Cyrus G. McCrory purchased 400 acres of land near Jennie's Colony. Cyrus G. McCrory died in 1869, and his son, Cyrus Wade McCrory (who went by Wade), was the administrator of his father's estate. Wade McCrory moved to Independence County and then to Waco, Texas, but maintained his farmland in Arkansas through sharecropping. In 1886 the St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern Railroad (which became Missouri Pacific in 1917) was building its east-west Bald Knob branch through Woodruff County. Wade McCrory donated 15 acres for the railroad right-of-way, a depot, and the town site. In September 1886 Dr. Gideon B. Fakes platted the town, which was named McCrory, and commercial and residential lots were sold. On Christmas Eve, 1889, 55 men signed a petition to incorporate McCrory, which was granted by the county court on January 30, 1890.

On October 27, 1909, a fire started in Edgar Marsh's Meat Market and destroyed a block of wood-frame buildings on the west side of S. Edmonds Avenue between

the railroad tracks and Main Street. Brick buildings were soon constructed to replace the earlier structures destroyed by the fire. By 1913, most of Edmonds Avenue between the railroad tracks and Third Street was occupied by commercial buildings. And by about 1935, McCrory had largely achieved its current architectural character.

McCrory's economy has long been dependent on agriculture, beginning with timber and cotton and expanding to include rice, soybeans, and wheat. McCrory is home to two of the county's largest farming operations--M. D. Thompson & Son and Morris Family Farms. Many granaries are located in McCrory, but the cotton gins owned by the Thompsons and the Morrises closed in the 1960s due to the decline of cotton production in the area. One of the largest employers in Woodruff County is located in McCrory--Lawhon Farm Services and its subsidiary, Delta King Seeds, which opened in 1959. Other employers include Centoco (a factory that manufactures toilet seats), the McCrory School District, and the Woodruff County Nursing Home.

E. 2nd Street

Raney Park—

Raney Park was named in honor of Walter Wilson Raney (1887-1966), assistant postmaster, newspaperman (he edited and published several papers here, including the *Woodruff County News*, *McCrory Enterprise*, *Home News*, and the *Arkansas Central Leader*), mayor of McCrory, state senator (representing Woodruff and Cross counties), real estate developer (Raney's Addition; just south of the tracks), undertaker (took over his father's undertaking business), Woodruff County Judge (1939-40), and member of many civic groups and fraternal organizations.

Walter Raney's father, Rev. Hartwell Thomas "Bud" Raney, established an undertaking business in 1898, and Walter worked with him for 19 years before assuming control of the business after his father's death in 1917. Walter Raney organized the Raney Burial Association, which provided burial insurance to

policyholders and was the first of its kind in Woodruff County. Raney also brought the first motor hearse to Woodruff County. He sold the undertaking business in 1948.

In 1927, when he was a state senator, Raney worked to pass a Confederate Pension Law, increasing the amount of Confederate Army pensions in Arkansas from \$12.50 a month to \$50 a month (\$600 a year). Raney published the *Arkansas Central Leader* from 1923 until 1953, when he sold it to Harlan Walker. In his newspaper, Raney devoted several pages each week to Confederate veterans and widows.

In his later years, Raney was well-known among local children because he carried a pocket of nickels and gave one to every child he met. He typically put the nickel in the child's back pocket or pulled it from behind their ear. Walter Raney died of a heart attack on January 17, 1966. After his death, his widow, Ida Mayo Raney, donated the lot at the northwest corner of E. 2nd and Jackson streets for a city park. The old Raney home place was formerly located on the park site.

McCrary Municipal Building—

The McCrary Municipal Building was constructed in 1964 and was designed by Memphis architect William B. Bekemeyer. The mid-century Modern building features windowless side walls and hexagon-shaped designs in the concrete block on the front façade.

104 E. 2nd (*Arkansas Central Leader* Building; now *Woodruff County Monitor*)—
As I told you earlier, Walter Raney established the *Arkansas Central Leader* in 1923. This building was constructed in 1948 to house the *Leader*. The *Leader* office was located here until 1995, when the *Leader* merged with the (Augusta?) *Advocate*. The *Monitor* bought the *Leader* and *Advocate* and became a county-wide newspaper. The *Monitor's* office was located at the northeast corner of 3rd & Edmonds until October 2013, when the newspaper moved back into this location. [Paula Harmon Barnett is the publisher (and Kip Davis's mother).]

109 E. 2nd (Dairy Queen; now Lane Vision Clinic)—

During the first half of the 20th century, a 2-story hotel (later residence) occupied this site. It faced east toward Jackson Street. The current building was constructed ca. 1965 as a Dairy Queen (called the Jaguar Den) and was a popular hangout for teenagers.

105 E. 2nd (ArkLa Gas; now McCrory Branch of Woodruff County Library)—

Built ca. 1950 to house the Arkansas Louisiana Gas Company (or ArkLa Gas). It was later used as the city services building (pay your water bills, etc.) and also housed a small library (1980s), and recently became the McCrory Branch of the Woodruff County Library System (grand opening held on July 9, 2014). The simple, brick building features its original tile-capped parapet and angled storefront.

103 E. 2nd (Ken Theater)—

Built 1950-1951 by the Jimerson family. It was named “Ken” after one of the Jimerson children. Mrs. Jewell Howell sold tickets, and Mr. Vernie sold concessions. The side door on the front façade was for black patrons, who sat in the lobby during the days of segregation. The theater remained open until 1978 or ‘79. The building was rehabilitated by Doyle Fowler (but is no longer owned by him) and reopened on June 20, 2007. It currently hosts movies and live performances. The building’s design is very simple with regular rows of header bricks, a soldier course, and a tile-capped parapet. Missing its original marquee.

North on N. Edmonds Ave., east side of street

203 N. Edmonds (U.S. Post Office & Federal Building)—

By 1913, a lumber shed and livery stable occupied this corner. In 1919 the building on the corner was the ArkMo Lumber Company’s lumber warehouse, and a building just to the north was vacant. ArkMo Lumber Company remained on the corner until at least 1938, and the building to the north housed an auto sales and service business. In the mid-20th century, the buildings housed Dr. George Napper’s office, Dr. Harris’s dental office, Alex Myers’s barber shop, and Smith Brothers Auto. Milas Ozier also had a body shop in there.

The Post Office was built in 1965.

219 N. Edmonds (McCrary United Methodist Church)—

In 1887 Mary Edmonds purchased lots 7 and 8 in block 10 and donated the land to the McCrary Methodist Episcopal Church South. The petition to incorporate McCrary was signed in 1889 in the original Methodist Church building. The church has been located on this corner ever since and currently occupies its third building on this site, built in 1932. The church was dedicated in October 1934. [NR nomination is incorrect about construction year.] The education building was constructed in the early 1960s.

The Methodist Church was designed in the Neoclassical style with a triangular pediment supported by Doric columns, arched window and door openings with keystones, and quoins at the corners.

301 N. Edmonds (Tractor & Car Dealership; old *Monitor* office)—

Built ca. 1915 as an auto dealership with a 60-car capacity. The dealership also sold tractors. In the mid-20th century, it was Hamp Riggs Ford, which sold Case tractors. Mr. Riggs lived right across the street from his business. The building later housed the *Monitor* office. The words “Thompson Tractor Shop” are barely visible in the recessed panels on the front façade, and there is a Coca-Cola ghost sign on the north elevation.

West side of N. Edmonds

306 N. Edmonds (Raney House)—

Built ca. 1940 for Walter Raney and his wife, Ida. Note its similarity to the Methodist Church (the Raney's were Methodist). Similar brick and stucco in the gable ends. Wrought-iron “R’s” by the front steps near the sidewalk.

South on N. Edmonds, west side of street

218 N. Edmonds (Merchants & Planters Bank)—

In the early 20th century, there was a house on this corner (occupied by the Greer family and later E. M. Well), but then it was a vacant lot for some time. The current building was constructed in the 1990s by Production Credit Association and was later acquired by Merchants and Planters Bank.

McCrorry Waterworks (NR-listed 2007)—

The water tower, shed, and water tank were built in 1935-1936 by the Chicago Bridge and Ironworks with \$39,497 from the Public Works Administration (PWA different from the WPA; both part of Roosevelt's New Deal). The adjacent office building was constructed ca. 1955. The McCrorry Waterworks is still in use today.

Vacant lot on Edmonds, in front of waterworks—1938 Sanborn shows an implement warehouse and fire department on this site. No longer extant.

210 N. Edmonds (Grocery warehouse/Masonic Lodge; now pawn shop/bail bonds)—

Built ca. 1910 and features recessed brick panels and pilasters with corbelling. This was a grocery warehouse on the first floor and the Masonic Lodge on the second floor. By 1919, it housed a farm implement store, and in 1938, it was a feed store. In the mid-20th century, it was Jan Young's Butane Gas and was later Byrd Glass and Paint (1980s to about 2007). At one time, the McCrorry Library was upstairs, and a hardware store was downstairs.

Vacant lot—

A historic building on this site housed Wood's Furniture and was one of several locations for Western Auto (W. A. here in the 1980s). Building demolished in the last few years (sometime since 2010).

206 N. Edmonds (now DB Photography)—

Built ca. 1935 with alterations. This building housed Walter Raney's undertaking business. Maybe housed a 5 & 10-cent store later?

204 N. Edmonds (gray building)—

Built ca. 1950 and housed the post office. Then it was Sears.

202 N. Edmonds (now Ralph Myers, III, Attorney)—

Built ca. 1920 with ca. 1980 façade. Arkansas Power & Light had an office in the corner portion of this building until 1978. That space later became Firestone. The Tom Fotis Café was also in this building.

Cross Second Street & Cross Edmonds Street. Looking at the east side of N. Edmonds, going south.

123 N. Edmonds (McCrary Mercantile; now Joe Peacock's law office)—

Built in 1908 to house the McCrary Mercantile (see panel on front façade). The mercantile was started by Wade McCrary, who in 1890 moved from Texas back to McCrary with his wife, Mollie, and their 9 children. Their son, Grover McCrary, was a clerk in his father's store. After graduating from the University of Arkansas School of Engineering, Grover returned to the area and became a teacher. He continued to acquire stock in the McCrary Mercantile during World War I, and when the company became Planters Mercantile, Grover was the principal stockholder. Another McCrary son, Jordan McCrary, owned a large amount of land in Woodruff County and later became president of Planters Mercantile, the successor to McCrary Mercantile. Planters Mercantile had dry goods on one side, a grocery on the other, and farm implements and supplies in the back.

This building was later a 5 & 10-cent store and then became Fred's Dollar Store. Although the storefront was drastically altered ca. 1995, it is one of the most elaborate commercial buildings in McCrary. It features Neoclassical details like a projecting cornice with dentils, pilasters, and decorative rectangular panels.

119 N. Edmonds (Pizza Plus)—

Built ca. 1910. In 1913, it was a drug store, followed by a grocery, and then it housed Hill's 5 & 10-cent store. At some point, the Myers Theater (owned by Paul Myers) may have been located in this building. [The Myers Theater was reportedly located in a 2-story building on the site of the current Ripper CPA building next door, but there was never a 2-story building on that site.]

Features some nice brick detail on the upper façade, and its three upper story windows are boarded.

117 N. Edmonds (William Ripper CPA)—

Built ca. 1925. Housed two tiny storefronts. The one on the north (or left) was Perry Holland's dry cleaners, and the one on the south (or right) was Ball's Clothing Store.

115 N. Edmonds (dark red brick)—

Built ca. 1922. Porter Best's Rexall Drug Store was here. Perry Holland owned the building from 1922 until 1975. Hickman's Cleaners was here after Porter Best. The building was heavily damaged by fire in 1975 and was rebuilt by Charlie Taylor.

113 N. Edmonds (Comer Building, 1927)—

[In the early 20th century, a large 2-story brick building occupied the space where the two Comer Buildings and the large yellow building are today. I'm not sure what happened to the 2-story building, but these were built to replace it in 1927.] One of at least three Comer Buildings in downtown McCrory. The Comer family was prominent in town. The building was likely constructed by a relative of Walter Raney's, as his mother was a Comer (Julia Antoinette Comer Raney).

The building's buff and brown brick façade is decorated by a rectangular panel made from soldier courses and stretcher bricks with cast-concrete squares at the corners. The name of the builder and construction year, Comer 1927, appears in the cast-concrete panel in the center.

This building was a location of Western Auto, before it moved north to the next block.

109-111 N. Edmonds (big yellow building)—

Built ca. 1927. Has some minimal brick detailing, but it is obscured by the yellow paint. This building housed Angelo's Clothing and was later Bur-Mack's Clothing (high-end clothing).

107 N. Edmonds (Comer Building, 1927 #2)—

Hamilton's Grocery and then has been a flower shop for a long time.

105 N. Edmonds (old Bank of McCrory; now outreach center thrift store)—
Built in 1909 to house the Bank of McCrory, this building features a decorative shaped parapet, projecting cornice with dentils, and rusticated brick pilasters with Ionic capitals (Neoclassical influence). The Bank of McCrory was organized in 1903 and built this building in 1909. Also during the first years of the 20th century, the Planters and Merchants Bank constructed a building at the southwest corner of 2nd and Edmonds. When Planters and Merchants Bank closed in 1917, the Bank of McCrory bought their building at 124 N. Edmonds and has been there ever since, albeit in a newer building.

The 1919 Sanborn map lists this as a restaurant. It was later Dunham's Grocery, a Laundromat, and other businesses. In the 1980s, it was Dough-Busters Pizza, which played off of the popular Ghostbusters movie.

It is currently being rehabilitated to serve as the McCrory Outreach Center Thrift Store.

101 N. Edmonds (Fake's Mercantile; now the Civic Center)--**Refreshments
Built ca. 1900 to house Fake's Mercantile (owned by Dr. Gideon B. Fakes, who platted the town?). This is a wonderful (practically unaltered) example of an early 20th century commercial building. It has decorative detailing on the upper façade, with dentil courses, rectangular panels, and pilasters with egg-and-dart molding. It still has the original recessed entry, wooden bulkheads, transom windows with wavy glass, cast-iron columns, cast-iron threshold (or kick-plate) with the company name stamped in it "Fakes Mercantile," and the original penny tile at the front entrance with the company name spelled out "Fakes Mercantile." The interior retains many original elements as well, including an intricate pressed tin ceiling, mezzanine, and office area with original safe.

Most patrons of this store were sharecroppers who came to get their supplies on credit from the big landowners.

In the 1960s, this was Dobbs Grocery.

Richard and Velma Chappell, who owned Chappell Drug, donated the money to restore this building, and it is named in their honor. The civic center is used for city council meetings and is rented out for parties/events.

Cross to west side of Edmonds and walk down West Main to 118 W. Main (Dr. J. W. Morris Clinic)

118 W. Main (Dr. John William Morris Clinic; NR-listed 2009)—

This building was constructed in 1936 to house the office and clinic of Dr. John William Morris. Dr. Morris was born in 1875 at Honey Hill, Arkansas, just west of Searcy. He graduated from medical school at the University of Nashville, Tennessee (later the University of Tennessee) in 1900 and moved to DeView, two miles south of McCrory, where he took over the practice of the local physician, Dr. Lumpkin. Dr. Morris moved to McCrory in 1922 and opened an office in a drug store on Edmonds Avenue. His practice moved twice before he built this building in 1936. When completed, it was hailed as the best and most modern clinic in the county. The clinic contained four beds and two examination rooms. On February 6, 1950, McCrory held a citywide celebration to honor Dr. Morris on his 75th birthday and to recognize his fifty years of medical service. All businesses in town were closed for two hours to participate in the festivities. A parade down Edmonds Avenue was led by the high school band, followed by Dr. and Mrs. Morris in a buggy. Residents who had been delivered by Dr. Morris or named after him and his wife and children were the next contingent.

In 1971 Dr. Morris was reported by *Ripley's Believe it or Not* to be the oldest practicing physician in the United States. When he turned 97 he was still seeing patients at his clinic as well as making house calls. Dr. Morris finally retired in 1975 at the age of 101. He died in 1979 at age 104.

The clinic was built using the Mixed Masonry technique with Craftsman influences. The use of concrete and stone, rather than brick and stone, was atypical for Mixed Masonry buildings, making the Morris Clinic unique. Its arcaded front porch is also a defining feature (although it is missing its roof, which was flat).

Back to Edmonds. Stay on west side of the street and talk about the east side, going south toward the railroad tracks.

Vacant lot at southeast corner of Edmonds & Main—

Site of the ca. 1905 Thompson Mercantile Building, which was destroyed by fire in 1955 or '56.

105 S. Edmonds (M. D. Thompson & Son, buyers of cotton, soybeans & rice)—

This building may have been part of the old Thompson Mercantile that was spared by the fire. The façade dates to the mid-20th century and may have been added after the fire. From 1908 until at least 1913, this building housed the post office. It was later George Proulx's Café ("Prou") and then Chappell Furniture.

107 S. Edmonds (G. L. Morris office w/ new façade & mansard awning)—

Built ca. 1908 with new façade and mansard awning. In 1913, this was a general store, and in 1919 dry goods and notions were sold here. In the mid-20th century, it was Holder's Men's Clothing. Nudy Arnof had an office in the back.

109 S. Edmonds (yellow and Roman brick w/ glass block)—

Built ca. 1930 with ca. 1955 Roman brick veneer on the storefront. Art Moderne influence with glass block and flat metal awning.

111 S. Edmonds (Wherry's Grocery)—

Built ca. 1900 to house a general store and then became Wherry's Grocery. Ed Darling's Café occupied one side of the Wherry Building. The Wherry family lived upstairs until the 1960s. The building was later occupied by Madison's Guaranty Savings and Loan.

The building's second story windows are set in segmental arches, and the cornice is decorated by brick corbelling. The building's storefront remains intact with transom windows, recessed entry, cast-iron columns, and a cast-iron threshold (or kick-plate) stamped with "Chickasaw Ironworks, Memphis, TN." Pressed metal ceiling inside?

The building is currently rented out for special events.

Point across tracks to site of Iron Mountain/MoPac Depot at southeast corner of tracks and Edmonds Avenue. A depot was constructed there shortly after the rail line came through in 1886, but I'm not sure if it was ever replaced. The 1913, 1919, and 1938 Sanborn maps show the same building footprint, but I don't know if it dated to 1886 or 1910... Four passenger trains used to come through McCrory each day. The depot was demolished in the late 1960s.

Walk on east side of Edmonds and talk about the west side of street, going north from tracks.

106-112 S. Edmonds (Miller-Jernigan-Arnof Building)—

Built ca. 1940 and features Carrera glass pilasters. The transom windows are boarded.

112 (Miller)—Gus Warren's barber shop, later Jim Miller's Café

110 (Jernigan)—pool hall called the Peewee Joint and later the Covered Wagon

108 (Arnof)—Shorty Reynolds's shoe store

106 (Arnof)—The Village Dress Shop (1960s) [Nudy Arnof was a prominent Jewish banker in McCrory.]

[A shoe repair shop operated by Grover Early (he was deaf and dumb) was located behind this building. It is still there. The city jail was also back there, but it is no longer extant.]

104 S. Edmonds (Hamilton Furniture & Hardware)—

Built in 1909 to house E. L. Hamilton's furniture and hardware store after the original wood-frame Hamilton store was destroyed by fire earlier that year.

Hamilton Furniture & Hardware wrapped around to Main Street and had storefronts at 101-103 W. Main as well. This building later housed the Friendly Store, which sold furniture.

100-102 S. Edmonds (Kyle Music Store)—

Built in 1909 to house W. B. Kyle's Music Store after the original wood-frame store was destroyed by fire earlier that year. By 1919, the post office moved into

the first floor of this building, and the local telephone exchange was upstairs. The post office remained here until at least 1938. This building was later home to Chappell's Drug Store (Richard and Velma Chappell). The county nurse visited McCrory each month and set up her office upstairs. In the 1990s, this was the Crafty Corner Flower Shop.

Cross Main & continue north

100-104 N. Edmonds (F. Lewis Building)—

Built ca. 1930 by McCrory resident Fletcher Lewis (large landowner and cotton farmer) and features modest brick detailing with insets of cast-concrete. This building contained 4 storefronts originally. Fore's Drug occupied the corner storefront (Ralph Fore operated the soda fountain), and later, the corner storefront and the one north of it housed McCrory Hardware (up until the late 1990s?). The last two storefronts were occupied by a pool hall and Emmett Garner's Barber Shop. Fletcher Lewis also had a cotton office in the building. At some point, Pete Dobbs' Grocery was in one of the middle storefronts.

106 N. Edmonds (Comer Building, 1927 #3; now Los Rios Mexican Restaurant)—

Built in 1927 by the Comer family (the panel with the name and date is obscured by the sign and awning). This was Troy Fraunebarger's Café, then Patton's Café, followed by the City Café.

108 N. Edmonds (Raney Building, 1961)—

After looking at Sanborn maps and the building itself, this appears to be a ca. 1935 commercial building. Perhaps Walter Raney remodeled it in 1961 and put a new panel on the façade?? This building housed Rand's Jewelry, and Vida Robertson had a beauty shop in the back. It was also John Marlow's Appliance.

110 N. Edmonds (Hair Hut; rock veneer)—

Built ca. 1935 with ca. 1970 stone veneer and mansard awning. This building housed the G. W. Barber Agency (insurance), a grocery store, teen center, and has been the Hair Hut for a long time.

112 N. Edmonds (Larry Smith Auto Parts, southernmost part)—
Built ca. 1930 with ca. 1980 sheet metal and brick façade. According to the 1938 Sanborn map, this was a movie theater (which one? Maybe the Jewel Theater?). In more recent memory, this was a fabric and sewing store.

114-118 N. Edmonds (Larry Smith Auto Parts, northern portion)—
From at least 1913 until 1938, the 2-story Waverly Hotel was located on this site. The hotel must have been demolished in the 1940s, because people remembered this lot being vacant for a while before the current building was constructed ca. 1955?

120 N. Edmonds (corrugated metal façade)—
Built ca. 1950. Housed Catherine Darling's Beauty Shop.

124 N. Edmonds (Bank of McCrory)—
I already told you that in 1917 the Bank of McCrory purchased the old Planters and Merchants Bank that was located on this corner, and has been here ever since. In 1955 the Bank of McCrory constructed a new building on this site. The bank's current façade dates to 1966, when the 1955 bank building was extensively remodeled.

Walk east on 2nd Street back to Raney Park.