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## Broadway Avenue and the Evolution of Mattoon's Central Commercial District

### Rachel Tavaras

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American icon Walt Disney once said, "Main Street, U.S.A, is America at the turn of the century—the crossroads of an era. The gas lamps and the electric lamps, the horse drawn car and the auto car. Main Street is everyone's hometown...the heartland of America." In this statement, Walt was referring to his synthetic portrayals of Main Street, an invented version of the phenomenon found across the country in his Disneyland and Walt Disney World theme parks. In these portrayals, Walt's Main Streets are romanticized and nostalgic. They are a tidy set up of storefronts reminiscent of yesteryear.



Figure 1. Walt Disney World's Main Street, U.S.A. Image courtesy of Staten Island Live.

In both his portrayals of Main Street and his statement above, Walt effectively captured idealized perceptions of Main Street. What is Main Street? Main Street most often refers to the street that was or is the central commercial district of a town or city. Main Street is the brick and mortar stores that line it, but it is also how these buildings are used that matters. Main Street is a cultural ideal, an icon of the American experience.<sup>49</sup> It is the idea that the shops that line the downtown districts of towns and cities help shape the American sociocultural experience. In this generic view Main Street must have been widespread, creating a familiar setup in towns across the United States.

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<sup>49</sup> Miles Orvell, *The Death and Life of Main Street: Small Towns in American Memory, Space, and Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 3.

This ideal is often times nostalgic, a romanticized reflection of what many deem to be an extinct phenomenon.

The physical space that creates Main Street shapes this ideology. Main Street America™, an organization advocating for the preservation of “Main Streets” across the country, defines Main Street as the historic downtown/neighborhood commercial center.<sup>50</sup> One such physical space that fits this definition within Coles County is Mattoon’s downtown district. Including Broadway Avenue and the surrounding area near what is now the Mattoon Amtrak Station, Mattoon’s downtown area presently continues to feature locally owned shops and restaurants. During its time as the central commercial district of Mattoon, Illinois, Broadway Avenue fit the ideal of Main Street, U.S.A. The district was lined with shops both locally owned and ones owned by large chains. These businesses had a powerful presence within the community as evident in how their advertisements dominated local newspapers.

Mattoon’s Broadway Avenue was the city’s central commercial district for over one-hundred years but then the central commercial district shifted. As ‘big-box’ stores such as Wal-Mart created a new central commercial district near the interstate highway, the central commercial district shifted physically and became increasingly disconnected with the Mattoon community. This might be interpreted as the “death” of “Main Street,” or in this case, Broadway Avenue. It was at least the death of Walt Disney’s idealized version of Main Street.

Who is to say that the nostalgic romanticized version of Main Street ever existed? While Mattoon’s new central commercial district might have more disconnect with the town, these big-box stores are, for better or for worse, the modern reality. According to the national narrative, and as indicated by the nostalgic perceptions of Main Street, this trend was national and Mattoon was not exempt. However, this shift was not simply cause and effect. Rather, for every town this shift occurred for a compilation of reasons and each set of circumstances was different. In the case of Mattoon, the town’s central commercial district is not about the death of Broadway Avenue, but, rather, it is about the natural evolution of a town. In this way, Mattoon very much adheres to the national narrative through its own unique combination of circumstances and chronology that caused its central commercial district to shift away from Broadway Avenue.



Figure 2. Mattoon’s Broadway Avenue. Photo by Rachel Tavaras, 2015.

Before exploring why, it is first useful to define what a commercial center is. A commercial center is simply the area of a city most used for business activity. If it is the most used, there must

<sup>50</sup> Main Street America™, accessed November 4, 2015, <http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/?referrer=https://www.google.com/#.VIS15N-rSb8>.

be something about it that attracts frequent patrons. It must provide a variety of retail stores, financial services, restaurants, and other businesses that provide everyday goods and services in such a way that attracts customers within the community.

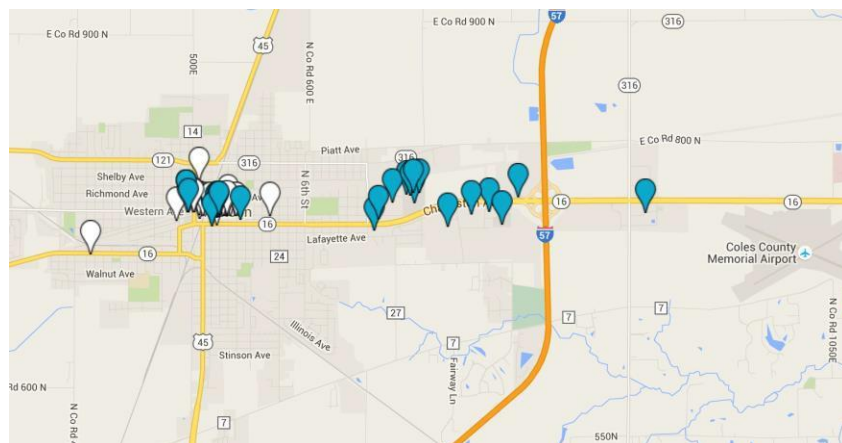


Figure 3. Map of Mattoon, 2015. Image courtesy of Google Maps. Points by Rachel Tavaras.

The commercial center in Mattoon has shifted, and the stores in this new commercial center are no longer largely locally owned. The figure above features a Google Map of Mattoon in 2015. The white points indicate a sample of commercial businesses and where they would have been located in 1955. The commercial businesses that are represented from 1955 include both locally owned stores such as Gehl Hardware and chain stores such as Montgomery Ward. Commercial businesses from 2015 are represented with blue points. Those represented include chain stores such as Dollar General and Wal-Mart. From this map, a shift east towards the interstate is evident between 1955 and 2015.

Mattoon is not alone in this phenomenon. This shift away from the Main Street ideal is national in scale. As suggested in nostalgic interpretations of Main Street and a call for its preservation, this shift could be interpreted as the death of Main Street or the threat of its extinction. Fear for the extinction of Main Street is hardly new. Even in the 1910s, the period shortly following Walt Disney's ideal turn of-the-century Main Street, chain stores such as Woolworth's began to move into these downtown areas, threatening the "mom and pop" shops that preceded them.<sup>51</sup> However, today more than ever, evidence of the death of Walt Disney's ideal is increasingly clear as, for most cities and towns, these Main Streets are no longer the commercial center.

What, then, happened in Mattoon? In order to understand the shift in Mattoon's commercial center, it is essential to understand the origins and evolution of Broadway Avenue and the immediately surrounding area. Mattoon's origin story is tied closely to the railroad.<sup>52</sup> In 1854, it was announced that the Illinois Central Railroad and the Terre Haute Alton Railroad would intersect in Mattoon.<sup>53</sup> The arrival of this crossing was so important to the development of Mattoon that the town's planners named the town after William B. Mattoon, the chief construction engineer for the Terre Haute and Alton Railroad.<sup>54</sup> There does not seem to be a particular reason why the town was

<sup>51</sup> Orvell, 51.

<sup>52</sup> *Mr. Mattoon's City (A Revised Edition of Mattoon, Origin and Growth, Published in 1946)* (Mattoon: The National Bank of Mattoon, 1955), 3.

<sup>53</sup> Craig Sanders, *Mattoon and Charleston Area Railroads* (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), 11.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

named for Mattoon instead of Roswell B. Mason, the supervisor for the construction of the Illinois Central Railroad. It has been speculated that if Mason had arrived before Mattoon that the city might have been named Mason.<sup>55</sup>

With the arrival of the railroad, Mattoon's settlers scurried to plot their newly named town.<sup>56</sup> From the start, Mattoon was oriented towards the railroad crossing that caused its development. This persisted for quite some time. A birds eye map of Mattoon from 1884, roughly thirty years after the town was originally plotted, shows a line of commercial buildings next to the intersection of the Illinois Central Railroad and what was the Terre Haute and Alton Railroad.<sup>57</sup>

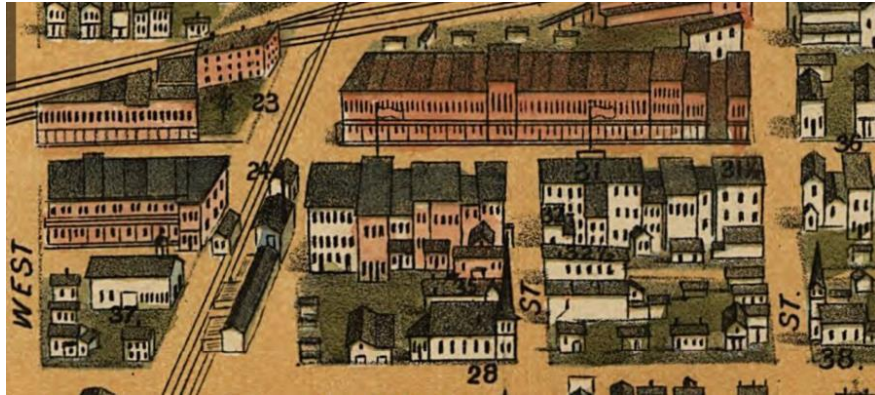


Figure 4. “Birds eye view of Mattoon, Illinois, 1884.” Image courtesy of the Library of Congress.

In the nineteenth century, the commercial buildings that the city had plotted originally were used by local shops, and Mattoon's downtown commercial district expanded. Broadway was home to many businesses that supplied Mattoon residents with everyday goods. The Kahn Brothers opened a clothing store, one of the first of its kind in Mattoon. There they sold surplus clothing from the Civil War at their store on 1713 Broadway Avenue. Louis Katz opened a department store selling clothes, trunks, and other like goods in the 1870s at the corner of 17th and Broadway.

By 1898, Katz sold his building to Valentine Schlicher, who turned the building into his furniture store.<sup>58</sup> In 1882, the firm Bower and Schulhoff opened a store selling housewares such as china and crockery on Broadway. In 1892, they opened a dry goods store. The George N. Buck store, a dry goods store located in the middle of the 1700 block on the south side of Broadway Avenue, became the biggest dry goods store in town in the 1880s. Phillip Woliung's blacksmith shop was not on Broadway Avenue, but it was close by at the 100 block of North 15th Street in the 1880s. Kelly & Kelly's Bakery and the Mattoon Steam Bakery were both on Broadway Avenue in the 1890s.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Sesquicentennial Committee, “Honoring 150 most influential people in Mattoon's History,” *Journal Gazette & Times Courier*, August 17, 2005.

<sup>56</sup> *Mr. Mattoon's City*, 3.

<sup>57</sup> At this point, the Terre Haute and Alton Railroad had become the Indianapolis and St. Louis Railroad: Mike McCormick, “Terre Haute known as railroad hub,” *Terre Haute Tribune Star*, February 23, 2003.

<sup>58</sup> “Department Store Enters 25<sup>th</sup> Year,” *Journal Gazette*, September 1, 1955.

<sup>59</sup> Jean Johnstone, Alice Larrabe, Gail Lumpkin, and Marianne Thiel, *Mattoon: A Pictorial History* (St. Louis: G. Bradley Publishing, Inc., 1993), 36-39, 118.



Figure 5. Kelly & Kelly's Baker, 1890s. Image courtesy of *Mattoon: A Pictorial History*.

The turn of the century saw the continuation of Broadway as a central commercial district. By 1904, there were thirty-seven grocery stores in town. While many were right outside of community members' homes, those stores with larger inventories were on Broadway Avenue. As Mattoon grew, by 1930, there were seventy-six grocery stores.<sup>60</sup> Other types of stores also grew in number. Many of these shops were locally owned, but some were chain stores. The following list is a sample stores where established on or near Broadway before 1955:

- Eisner food store opened in 1898.<sup>61</sup>
  
- In 1900, William Wesley Hendren opened a shoe repair shop on the 1800 block of Broadway Avenue. He later sold the building in the 1940s and moved his repair shop to 18<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>62</sup>
  
- The Kahn Brothers sold their store to Arthur Sommers in the 1900s, who went on to sell the store to A.H. Adler in 1912. A.H. Adler kept the store until 1922. The Kraft Clothing Company, a regional chain in the Midwest, then purchased the store. In 1932, when Kraft was liquidating stores, partners Ross and Breedlove bought the shop. Breedlove left the firm that same year and Earl Ross continued to run the store, changing the name to Earl Ross, Clothier.<sup>63</sup>
  
- The Basket Grocery opened at 1513-15 Broadway Avenue in 1917. It later became known as Icenogle Food.<sup>64</sup>
  
- Elliot Jeweler opened in 1908.<sup>65</sup>
  
- Fred Smith Shoe Store opened in 1910 and moved to 1528 Broadway in 1955.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 132.

<sup>61</sup> Eisner food store, Advertisement, September 1, 1955, *Journal Gazette*.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 118.

<sup>63</sup> "Ross-Lucas Co. One of City's Oldest," *Journal Gazette*, September 1, 1955.

<sup>64</sup> "Icenogle's Store has Long History," *Journal Gazette*, September 1, 1955.

<sup>65</sup> Elliot Jeweler, Advertisement, September 1, 1955, *Journal Gazette*.

- The Grand Theater opened in 1911. It burnt down in 1938. Edward Clarke bought the theater and renamed it to Time Theater.<sup>67</sup>
- W. Frank Hampton opened Hampton's Leading Jewelers in 1911 at 109 N. 16<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>68</sup>
- Henry DeBuhr at 2001 Western Avenue opened DeBuhr Seed Store in 1914.<sup>69</sup>
- Frank X. Spitz opened a men's clothing store in 1915 on Broadway.<sup>70</sup>
- J.E. Leitzell Photo Studio opened in 1913.<sup>71</sup>
- W.S. Henry Jeweler opened in 1915.<sup>72</sup>
- J.C. Penney opened in 1920 at 1515 Broadway Avenue.<sup>73</sup>
- Gehl's Hardware opened in 1922 at 1815 Broadway Avenue.<sup>74</sup>
- Bidwell's Candies opened in 1924 when Virgil Bidwell moved his business from Attica, Indiana.<sup>75</sup>
- Newgent's Shoe Store opened in 1924.<sup>76</sup>
- Kirk's Appliances opened in 1925 at 1622 Broadway Avenue. In 1930, they moved to 109 S. 19th St., then to 1520 Broadway Ave. in 1935, to 1901 Broadway Ave. in 1938, and finally to 1912-14 Western Ave. in 1941.<sup>77</sup>
- City Shoe Shop opened in 1926.<sup>78</sup>
- In 1928, Miss Minnie M. Lewis opened a ready-to-wear clothing store at 1706 Broadway Avenue. She sold the store to George M. and Helen Montgomery in 1947, and the store's name became Helen Montgomery's.<sup>79</sup>
- Montgomery Ward, a chain department store, opened a store in Mattoon in the late

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<sup>66</sup> Fred Smith Shoe Store, Advertisement, September 1, 1955, *Journal Gazette*.

<sup>67</sup> Mattoon Sesquicentennial Committee.

<sup>68</sup> Hampton's Leading Jewelers, Advertisement, September 1, 1955.

<sup>69</sup> Mattoon Sesquicentennial Committee.

<sup>70</sup> Spitz, Advertisement, September 1, 1955, *Journal Gazette*.

<sup>71</sup> J.E. Leitzell Photo Studio, Advertisement, September 1, 1955, *Journal Gazette*.

<sup>72</sup> W.S. Henry Jeweler, Advertisement, September 1, 1955, *Journal Gazette*.

<sup>73</sup> J.C. Penney, Advertisement, September 1, 1955, *Journal Gazette*.

<sup>74</sup> Mattoon Sesquicentennial Committee.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Nugent's Shoe Store, Advertisement, September 1, 1955, *Journal Gazette*.

<sup>77</sup> Kirk's Appliances, Advertisement, September 1, 1955, *Journal Gazette*.

<sup>78</sup> City Shoe Shop, Advertisement, September 1, 1955, *Journal Gazette*.

<sup>79</sup> "Quality, Not Price, Builds Business," *Journal Gazette*, September 1, 1955.

1920s at the corner of 17<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway.<sup>80</sup>

- Young’s department store was founded in 1931 in the location of what was formerly Katz and Sons Clothiers then Schlicher’s furniture store.<sup>81</sup>
- Burtschi’s Book and Gift Shop opened in 1933 at 1612 Broadway Avenue.<sup>82</sup>
- William Furste expanded his Charleston-based auto supply store to Mattoon in 1935 at 1622 Broadway Avenue.<sup>83</sup>
- Warner’s Gift Shop and Office Equipment Stores open in 1937.<sup>84</sup>
- Sears, a chain department store, opened in Mattoon in 1940 at 1406 Broadway Avenue.<sup>85</sup>
- Arcade Drug Store opened in 1940 at the corner of 17<sup>th</sup> Street and Charleston Avenue.<sup>86</sup>
- Myers Bros. was a Springfield-based regional department store chain that opened at 1705 Broadway Avenue in 1947.<sup>87</sup>

The first half of the nineteenth century was a dynamic time of growth for Mattoon. The population went from 9,622 in 1900 to 17,547 in 1950.<sup>88</sup> As evident from this brief list, the commercial center of Mattoon saw its share of growth and development as well. While grocery stores such as Basket Grocery and clothiers such as Spitz’s met the basic necessities of Mattoon residents, the demand for “miscellaneous” products needed to be addressed. Often, chain department stores or variety stores would answer to this demand.<sup>89</sup> This trend was apparent in Mattoon, as evident when department stores such as J.C. Penney moved onto Broadway Avenue. These chain stores brought with them modern storefronts and advertising. In wake of the Great Depression especially, locally owned stores needed to compete.<sup>90</sup> Stores in the 1930s through the 1950s in Mattoon streamlined their exteriors to keep up with the times. Figure 6 is a collage of stores on Broadway Avenue from the 1930s-1950s. Locally owned shops such as Furste’s streamlined and modernized their buildings with architectural styles such as Art Moderne. This trend was not subtle, as stores such as Bower and Schulloff advertised the re-openings for their newly remodeled stores (Figure 7). Such efforts were apparently successful, as many of these stores stayed open well into the post-World War II era.

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<sup>80</sup> Montgomery and Ward, Advertisement, September 1, 1955, *Journal Gazette*.

<sup>81</sup> “Ross-Lucas Co. One of City’s Oldest.”

<sup>82</sup> Mattoon Sesquicentennial Committee.

<sup>83</sup> Furste’s, Advertisement, September 1, 1955, *Journal Gazette*.

<sup>84</sup> Warner’s Gift Shop and Office Equipment Stores, Advertisement, September 1, 1955, *Journal Gazette*.

<sup>85</sup> Sears, Advertisements, June 23, 1955 and September 1, 1955, *Journal Gazette*.

<sup>86</sup> Arcade Drug Store, Advertisement, September 1, 1955, *Journal Gazette*.

<sup>87</sup> Myer Bros., Advertisement, September 1, 1955, *Journal Gazette*.

<sup>88</sup> US Census, 1900, Census Place: *Mattoon, Coles County, Illinois*; US Census, 1950, Census Place: *Mattoon, Coles County, Illinois*.

<sup>89</sup> Orvell, 101.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.



Figure 6. Collage of storefronts on Broadway Avenue from the 1930s-1950s. Image courtesy of *Mattoon: A Pictorial History*.

**You Are Invited to Attend the**  
**GRAND OPENING**  
**of Our Newly Remodeled Store**

**SALE BEGINS SATURDAY, APRIL 13th**

**JUST IN TIME FOR EASTER!**  
**NEWEST \$5.95**  
 Special! 100% Wool, Tailored for Women and Men

**EASTER SUITS AND COATS!**  
**\$10.95**  
 Special! 100% Wool, Tailored for Women and Men

**THAT EASTER BONNET!**  
**\$1.95**  
 Special! 100% Wool, Tailored for Women and Men

**A NEW DEPARTMENT FOR MEN**  
 Special! 100% Wool, Tailored for Women and Men

**Bower & Schulhoff Co.**  
 MATTOON, ILLINOIS

Figure 7. Advertisement for Bower & Schulhoff Co.'s "Grand Opening" for their newly remodeled store during the Great Depression, April 11, 1935. Image courtesy of the *Journal Gazette*.



However, as suggested before, Broadway Avenue's days as Mattoon's commercial center did not last forever. As indicated by the map in Figure 3, Mattoon's commercial center has shifted in the last fifty years. Taking a closer look at the map (Figure 8), it is evident that Broadway was crowded with shops in 1955.<sup>1</sup> But why use 1955 as a point of examination? Many theories and general postwar national narratives fall into the post-World War II period. The so-called "death of Main Street" is often considered to be a postwar phenomenon. 1955 falls well into this postwar period. The year 1955 also falls into the national narrative of the thriving Eisenhower years. At this time, new consumer goods were flying off shelves, as, for some Americans, prosperity was widespread.<sup>2</sup>

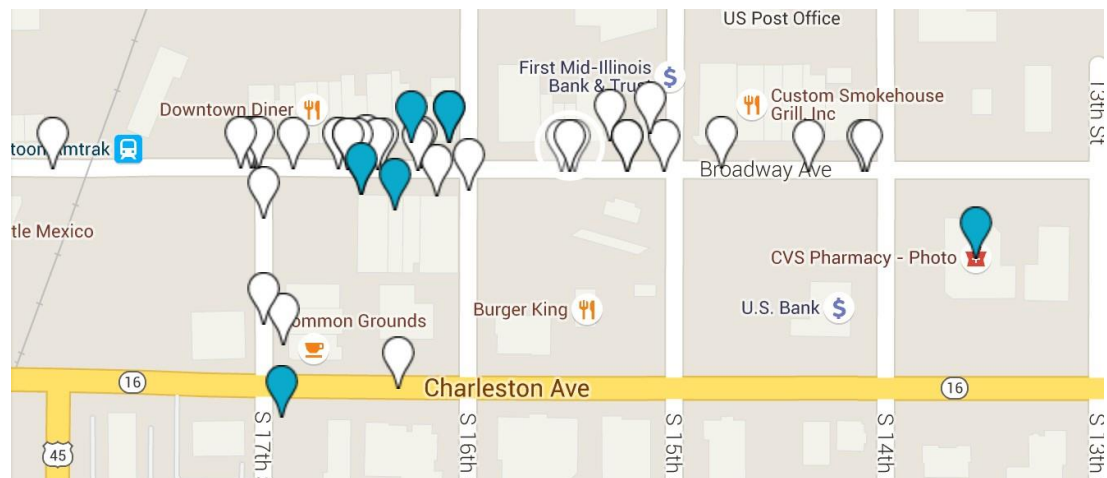


Figure 8. Map of Mattoon, 2015. Image courtesy of Google Maps. Points by Rachel Tavaras.

Such prosperity and the expansion of a consumer-oriented economy led to the advent of the shopping mall, an event that in theories attribute to the "death" of Main Street.<sup>3</sup> In blaming shopping malls, these theories suggest that the "mushrooming" of these malls in American towns, starting in the postwar period and pushing through into the 1980s and 1990s, caused original central commercial business districts to move.<sup>4</sup> In Mattoon's case, Cross County Mall opened a couple of miles away from the central commercial district on Broadway Avenue in 1971, where the central commercial district of 2015 stands.<sup>5</sup> In 1955, however, this theory had not yet affected Mattoon.

Other theories attribute the "death" of Main Street with Post-World War II suburbanization, stating that the retail stores moved to postwar suburbs, causing even mammoth "Main Streets" such as Chicago's State Street to falter.<sup>6</sup> This theory hardly applies to Mattoon, given that Mattoon was a small city in its own right and was not suspect to the effects of suburbanization. Being roughly 130 miles from Indianapolis and 180 miles from Chicago, Mattoon was far from cities that experienced this phenomenon. Like in most towns, the "death" of Main Street (or Broadway

<sup>1</sup> Again, the white points indicate businesses from 1955 and blue points indicate businesses from 2015. These are not representative of all businesses present in each year.

<sup>2</sup> Paul S. Boyer, *Promises to Keep: The United States Since World War II* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2005), 115.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Bailey, "Memory, Place, and the Mall: George Romero on Consumerism," *Studies in Popular Culture* 35 (Popular Culture Association in the South, 2013), 96.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, "All the World's a Mall: Reflections on the Social and Economic Consequences of the American Shopping Center," *The American Historical Review* 101 (Oxford University Press, 1996), 1117.

<sup>5</sup> "Grand Opening Mall Ceremonies Thursday," *Journal Gazette*, October 26, 1971.

<sup>6</sup> Robert J. Carey, "American Downtowns: Past and Present Attempts at Revitalization," *Built Environment* 14 (Alexandrine Press, 1988), 47.

Avenue) in Mattoon as a central commercial district is far more complicated than suburbanization or the “mall” of Broadway Avenue.

Besides falling into the earlier postwar narrative that addresses the theories mentioned, the year 1955 in Mattoon saw the longevity of longstanding commercial businesses on and near Broadway. Many businesses that started between the turn-of-the-century and World War II were still open in 1955. Stores such as Young’s, (established in 1931), Earl Ross, and Clothier (established in 1932) maintained a presence within Mattoon’s central commercial district. Using 1955 as a case study demonstrates such continuity.

The year 1955 was also a year of celebration for Mattoon. It was that year that Mattoon had their centennial. This resulted in a wealth of publications such as *Mr. Mattoon’s City* that detailed the history of the town. Local businesses also participated in the celebration, putting out advertisements that detailed their own histories and place in Mattoon up until that point. The *Journal Gazette*, Mattoon’s local newspaper, put out a special issue of 160 pages including blurbs about the town’s history including the influence of local businesses.



Figure 9. “Centennial Paper Carpets Basketball Court.” Image courtesy of the *Journal Gazette*, September 2, 1955.

What, then, did Broadway Avenue in Mattoon look like in 1955? The following list details a sample of businesses open that year on Broadway by block and near Broadway:

- 1400 Block, Broadway Avenue
  - Moore and Moore Homebuilders
  - Schwarz Auto Parts
  - Sears: department store chain
  - Time Theater: a local movie theater
  
- 1500 Block, Broadway Avenue
  - Mattoon Paint and Wallpaper
  - Gibson’s: furniture store
  - Andermann’s
  - Hampton’s, Inc.: jewelry store

- J.E. Leitzell Photo Studio
- J.C. Penney: department store chain
- Fred Smith's Shoe Store
- City Shoe Shop (corner of 16<sup>th</sup> St. and Broadway)
  
- 1600 Block, Broadway Avenue
  - Eisner: food store
  - Furste's Auto Shop
  - Newgent's Shoe Store
  - Lester's: clothier
  - Burtschi's Book and Gift Shop
  
  - Young's Department Store
  - Singer Sewing Center
  - Freedman's (Clothier)
  - Bing's Jewelry & Optical Store
  - Lord's (Clothier)
  - Earl Ross (Clothier)
  - Spitz Clothiers, Inc.
  
- 1700 Block, Broadway Avenue
  - W.S. Henry Jeweler
  - Myers Bros.: regional department store chain
  - Helen Montgomery Ready to Wear Shop: clothier
  - Bergner Store: department store
  
- 1800 Block, Broadway Avenue
  - Gehl Hardware
  - Sullivan Sewing Center
  - Parson's Paint and Wallpaper Store<sup>7</sup>

These downtown stores dominated the *Journal Gazette* with advertising. Both local and chain stores on and near the central commercial district filled 1955 newspapers with illustrative ads and coupons. When Mattoon celebrated its centennial in 1955, Broadway Avenue stores acknowledged the feat with congratulatory advertisements. Some local businesses, such as Hampton's, Inc., included a detailed account of their role in Mattoon's history in these advertisements (Figure 10). Chain stores such as Sears and J.C. Penney recognized the festivities with advertisements mentioning their expansions in Mattoon and offered congratulations to the city. Likewise, many articles from the special centennial issue of the *Journal Gazette* concentrated on local businesses, including many of those that were still in existence at the time. These stores, chain and local alike, clearly had a special place in the community.

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<sup>7</sup> Addresses provided by the 1955 Mattoon Business Directory and advertisements from the 1955 editions of the *Journal Gazette*.

**HAMPTON'S**  
The Name You Can Depend On  
LEADING JEWELERS



W. Frank Hampton

W. Frank Hampton, founder of Hampton's Jewelry Store, and one of the oldest, active business men on Mattoon's Broadway, started his watch repairing career at Hildaigo, Illinois, in 1897, or 58 years ago. Shortly after this, in 1903 he secured employment as a watch-repairman, with Bert and Glenn Brown, jewelers, and C. A. Williams, jeweler, of Terre Haute, Indiana. A few years later, from 1907 through 1910, he was employed by C. A. Emily, jeweler, of Casey, Illinois.

Mr. Hampton came to Mattoon in April, 1911, as a watch-repairman for the late Chas. T. Welch (mayor of Mattoon at that time.) In 1918, Mr. Hampton was employed by the late John Elliott in his jewelry store.

Ever ambitious and striving to get ahead, W. Frank Hampton founded his own business at 109 North 16th St., known as W. Frank Hampton, Watchmaker & Jeweler. From the start this business enterprise was very successful because of Mr. Hampton's integrity.

## 44 YEARS OF SERVICE

IN MATTOON



In 1927 Don joined the business, after which the firm was known as Hampton & Son, Jewelers. In 1937, an older son, Wayne, joined the business, and the firm continued as Hampton & Sons, Jewelers, and under the management of Wayne Hampton, the firm continued to enlarge and expand.

In 1938, the location of the jewelry store was moved to 1519 Broadway (now known as Berkman St) where a new blue glass front was installed, making Hampton's one of the outstanding stores in Mattoon.

In 1944, the store was moved to 1523 Broadway into a completely remodeled store, one of the most modern, completely stocked, up-to-date jewelry stores in central Illinois, continuing to enjoy progress and growth along with Mattoon, under the name of "Hampton's, Inc., Leading Jewelers" Registered Jewelers, American Gem Society.

W. Frank Hampton is still very active in the jewelry and watch-repair business, and enjoys his many friends and associates in Mattoon and vicinity, recalling many incidents and changes that have taken place in the past years.

**Famous Names of the Highest Quality**

Keepsake Diamond Rings — Eight, Hamilton, Bulova, Gruen and Rolex Watches — Cardinal Diamond Rings — Parker and Sheffer Pens and Pencils — Wallace, International and Lunt Sterling — Prince Gardner and Bocca Leather Goods — Community, 1847 Rogers Bros., Holmes & Edwards Silverplate — Cannon, Ronson and Zippo Lighters — Franciscan Fine China — Russell Wright, Peach Blossom and California Ivy Dish Ware — Cambridge and Tiffin Crystal — Seth Thomas, Telechron and Westclox Clocks — Spindel, Genes and JB Watch Bands.

You'll Find Them All at Hampton's



# HAMPTON'S, INC.

Registered Jewelers      MATTOON'S DIAMOND STORE      1523 Broadway



Don Hampton

Figure 10. Hampton's, Inc. advertisement for Mattoon's Centennial Celebration. Image courtesy of the *Journal Gazette*, September 1, 1955.

With so much influence, what happened to Broadway Avenue? In the 1960s, Mattoon saw a couple of major changes in its landscape. A new four-lane highway, which became Illinois Route 16, was built between Mattoon and Charleston in 1962, connecting the two cities more efficiently.<sup>8</sup> In 1969, an exit off of I-57, an interstate highway, in Mattoon onto Illinois Route 16 was built.<sup>9</sup> Cars were becoming more practical in American life.<sup>10</sup> This was promoted with similar measures of transportation efficiency across the country such as the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 that authorized the construction of a national interstate highway system with the use of federal funds.<sup>11</sup> This increased ease of transportation via automobiles allowed for shopping centers outside of the downtown commercial center to prosper. In 1971, just two years after the interstate exit was built, Cross County Mall opened in Mattoon off of Route 16. The mall is roughly a couple of miles away from the original central business district near Broadway and about a mile away from I-57. The ease of travel offered by I-57 and Route 16 made this location desirable as new shopping centers inched away from Broadway Avenue. Following its establishment, chain stores like J.C. Penney and Sears that were once located on Broadway Avenue moved to the shopping mall.

In 1982, Wal-Mart opened in Mattoon at 301 Richmond Avenue, between Mattoon's historic downtown and the Cross County Mall.<sup>12</sup> The location seemed to acknowledge the town's commercial center while maintaining easy access to Route 16. In 1992, Wal-Mart moved to its current location at Dettro Drive off of Route 16 with close proximity to I-57.<sup>13</sup> At that point, Wal-Mart advertised themselves as a "Super Center." In recent history, stores like Wal-Mart have posed as a large threat to "Main Street." Such big-box stores offer cheap merchandise in an efficient,

<sup>8</sup> Rich Carlson, *Illinois Highways*, Webpage, 2005. Accessed November, 15, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Arthur Jackman, "Illinois Schedules Its Largest Highway Building Program," *Chicago Tribune*, February 16, 1969.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas W. Hanchett, "U.S. Tax Policy and the Shopping Center Boom of the 1950s and 1960s," *The American Historical Review* 101 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1083.

<sup>11</sup> Boyer, 220.

<sup>12</sup> "Wal-Mart Set to Open Tuesday in Mattoon," *Journal Gazette*, November 1, 1982.

<sup>13</sup> "Land in trusts develops near Interstate 57," *Journal Gazette*, August 17, 2005.

one-stop place by offering every necessity and beyond, including clothing, groceries, hardware, auto supplies, stationary, and more.<sup>14</sup> The store offers everything that Mattoon's Broadway Avenues stores in 1955 offered in one place conveniently located off of the highway.

Other chain stores followed Wal-Mart. Within close proximity, Staples opened in 1998, Home Depot opened in 2002, and Aldi's opened in 2004.<sup>15</sup> What is striking about these new shopping centers when compared to the stores that once lined Broadway Avenue is their disconnect with the community. Unlike the stores such as Gehl Hardware or Eisner's food store, Wal-Mart does not have an origin story that ties closely to Mattoon. For instance, the *Journal Gazette's* special sesquicentennial edition mentioned businessman Katz as a notable person, yet Wal-Mart founder Sam Walton was not mentioned.<sup>16</sup>

Unlike J.C. Penney or Sears of 1955, Wal-Mart did not actively acknowledge Mattoon's sesquicentennial in the town's publications.<sup>17</sup> Some chain businesses such as Dairy Queen, local organizations such as churches, and local stores such as Schilling Funeral Home congratulated Mattoon in the newspapers, but the amount of acknowledgment was overall underwhelming when compared to the newspaper advertisements put out in congratulations to the city in 1955. This could be in part due to the decline in importance of news print publications throughout recent years due to the expansion of the Internet, but it seems to be at least in part due to the change in the city's commercial landscape.

What does Mattoon's commercial center look like today? Today, it is a Wal-Mart Supercenter surrounded by chain stores and restaurants in strip malls near the interstate. If the commercial center has shifted, what happened to Broadway Avenue? Broadway Avenue, the commercial center of Mattoon almost fifty years ago, is still home to many local businesses. The Downtown Diner, Jack and Bill's clothing store, and D To Z Sports keep customers in the community coming to Broadway Avenue. Other buildings are the location of services such as the State Farm insurance company. Many buildings on Broadway Avenue stand empty or are at least in disrepair. Walking down the avenue, one will find many boarded windows and bare storefronts.



Figure 11. 1824 Broadway Avenue, Mattoon, Illinois. Photo by Rachel Tavaras, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Fishman, *The Wal-Mart Effect: How an Out-of-Town Superstore Became a Superpower* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 223.

<sup>15</sup> "Land in trusts develops near Interstate 57."

<sup>16</sup> *Journal Gazette*, August 17 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Despite the disrepair, there have been attempts at revitalization on Broadway Avenue with a renewed focus on local shops. Sears Hometown on Broadway advertises itself as a locally owned option affiliated with the Sears hardware store chain. The Facebook group Celebrate Downtown Mattoon promotes Broadway Avenue and surrounding stores, raising awareness for local options away from the current commercial center through social media.

It was a combination of circumstances that caused Mattoon's central commercial district to shift. Separately, these events were not unique to Mattoon. The establishment of Wal-Mart, shopping malls, and the federal interstate system was national in scale. Rather, it is how these events transpired that makes this story unique to Mattoon. From the start, Mattoon's commercial center was oriented towards transportation. When railroads were most efficient for transportation, the town of Mattoon plotted its central commercial district to establish easy access to the intersection of two rail lines that made the city. This persisted for over one hundred years until automobile transportation became the most efficient after the development of Route 16 and I-57.

Like many cities, a mall and a Wal-Mart were established in Mattoon, and the shift away from "Main Street" continued. Today, Broadway Avenue is unrecognizable when compared to the Broadway Avenue of 1955. This might be interpreted as the "death" of the American ideal of Main Street. However, Route 16 near I-57 is now, in a sense, the new Main Street. It is a Main Street lined with Wal-Mart and other chain stores rather than locally owned options mixed in with chains within charming turn-of-the-century facades. For better or for worse, this is the modern reality despite their disconnect with the Mattoon community. This might be the death of the ideal Main Street, but it is not the death of Main Street as a physical space and a commercial center. The history of Mattoon's central commercial district is not about a death, but, rather, it is about the evolution of a town.