

**Walks through History
Downtown West Memphis
September 17, 2011
By: Rachel Silva**



Intro

Hi, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Welcome to the Walks through History tour of downtown West Memphis! Today we're not "walking through history" because Main Street West Memphis has graciously provided us with bus transportation. I'd like to thank Main Street West Memphis, in particular, Executive Director Leigh Ann Hastings, as well as the West Memphis Chamber of Commerce and its executive director, Holmes Hammett, for their support. And I'd like to thank a couple local merchants who helped me gather information for the tour—Danny Craft and Alfred Saig.

Our tour will include 3 properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places—the West Memphis City Hall (NR-listed 2010), the West Memphis CHD (consists of 700-900 blocks of E. Broadway; NR-listed 2008), and the Wilson Power & Light Company Ice Plant (NR-listed 2010).

Brief History of West Memphis

Benjamin Fooy (or Foy), one of the earliest recorded white settlers in the area near present-day West Memphis, was a native of Holland sent by the Spanish governor of Louisiana to establish a settlement on the Mississippi River. Fooy settled in Memphis, TN, in 1792, and moved in 1795 to the west side of the Mississippi River. In 1797 the hamlet, designated "Fooy's Point," took the name Camp de la

Esperanza or as translated, Field of Hope.¹ After the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, the settlement became part of the United States and was known as “Hopefield.” Benjamin Fooy was named as the region’s United States Magistrate. Fooy, noted for his honest character and extensive knowledge of the country, ran a clean and lawful town with a bright future until his death in 1823. However, after Fooy’s death, Hopefield became a haven for gamblers and thieves banned from Memphis.²

Crittenden County was established in 1825, eleven years before Arkansas became a state (1836). Named after Robert Crittenden, the first secretary of Arkansas Territory, the county had a population of 1,272 in 1830. In 1857 Hopefield became the eastern terminus for the Memphis and Little Rock Railroad, despite its rowdy reputation. But in 1861 the Civil War temporarily halted track construction just east of the St. Francis River.³

During the summer of 1862 Memphis fell into the hands of Union forces. Most Confederate soldiers were ferried across the river to Hopefield, Arkansas, and surrounding farms. Many of these soldiers were moved to other locations, but some remained to harass the Union forces at Memphis and disrupt river traffic. This became such a problem that on February 19, 1863, four companies of Federal forces burned Hopefield to the ground. The town of Hopefield was rebuilt after the war but never regained the prominence it once held in Crittenden County. In 1871 the Memphis and Little Rock Railroad was completed, aiding Hopefield’s economic recovery. Hopefield was eventually destroyed by floodwaters in 1912 when the Mississippi River changed course. Today, the supporting piers of the Interstate 40 bridge rest atop the old location of Hopefield.⁴

Crittenden County needed a new center for government and business after the Civil War. In 1884 the first town of West Memphis was platted on the banks of the Mississippi River south of the Hopefield site. By 1885 the town had over 200 residents and Robert Vance was appointed the first postmaster. The first West Memphis site had a grain elevator, a hotel and boarding houses, and two sawmills.

¹ This name came from the Spanish Fort Esperanza, which was built in 1795 on the west side of the Mississippi River. Grif Stockley, “Crittenden County,” *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*, Internet, accessed 16 February 2010; available from <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=762>.

² Smith, “West Memphis Commercial Historic District,” Section 8; Charlotte C. Wicks, “West Memphis,” *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*, Internet, accessed 16 February 2010; available from <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=871>.

³ Smith, “West Memphis Commercial Historic District,” Section 8.

⁴ Smith, “West Memphis Commercial Historic District,” Section 8; Wicks, “West Memphis,” *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*; David O. Demuth, “The Burning of Hopefield,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (Summer 1977): 123-129.

However, when the Kansas City, Fort Scott & Memphis RR (later the St. Louis & San Francisco or “Frisco”) completed the first railroad bridge over the MS River at Memphis in 1892, the focus gradually shifted from river transportation to rail transportation. In addition, the MS River levee in Crittenden County was constructed far back from the actual river, leaving river bank towns like Hopefield and the first West Memphis defenseless against floods. These circumstances led to the establishment of the second West Memphis on the other side of the levee near the intersection of present-day 8th & Jefferson streets.⁵

Because the new town of West Memphis was surrounded by vast forests of old growth trees, the lumber industry became the fuel for its progress into the twentieth century. In 1904, Zack Bragg moved to West Memphis and opened the Bragg Sawmill. Bragg was able to ship his milled lumber and logs by rail and by river. In 1914 P.T. Bolz of St. Louis opened the Bolz Slack Barrel Cooperage Plant in West Memphis.⁶

Because West Memphis was still subject to some of the country’s most disastrous floods due the Mississippi River backing up into the St. Francis River, the growth of the city was delayed. It was not until the importance of the automobile and its rapid rise as the major mode of transportation that the growth of West Memphis began in earnest. The first automobile bridge across the Mississippi River at Memphis was constructed in 1917. This heralded the growth of West Memphis as its main street, Broadway Avenue, became a U.S. Highway and traffic began streaming through the town.⁷

West Memphis was officially incorporated in 1923 and continued to grow to become the largest city in Crittenden County. The availability of river and rail transportation transformed West Memphis into the manufacturing and distribution hub of the county. Although the disastrous 1927 Mississippi River Flood and the Great Depression negatively impacted West Memphis, the city grew and developed at a record pace between 1930 and 1940 due to its location at the intersection of

⁵ West Memphis Chamber of Commerce, “History of West Memphis,” Internet, accessed 16 February 2010; available from http://www.wmcoc.com/westmemphis_information/history_of_westmemphis.htm.

⁶ West Memphis, formally known as Garvey and Bragg’s Spur, received its current name when General George Nettleton, an official of the Kansas City and Fort Scott Railroad, named the town “West Memphis” in order to bring a higher price for lumber. The town of Hulbert was annexed by West Memphis in 1955. Smith, “West Memphis Commercial Historic District,” Section 8; Stockley, “Crittenden County,” Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture; Wicks, “West Memphis,” Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture; West Memphis Chamber of Commerce, “History of West Memphis,” Internet; Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, “West Memphis, Arkansas,” maps (1930, 1938); Kara Mills, “Memphis and Arkansas Bridge, West Memphis, Arkansas,” National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. From the files of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (2001): Section 8.

⁷ Smith, “West Memphis Commercial Historic District,” Section 8.

several major rail lines as well as its industrial base. The population of West Memphis almost quadrupled during the 1930s, increasing from 895 in 1930 to 3,369 in 1940. By 1938 West Memphis was home to four lumber companies, four cotton seed oil companies, three cotton gins, a cotton compress (one of the state's largest), a feed mill, a distillery, and an ice plant. And perhaps the town's most notable export from that era was its original Blues music. At one time Sonny Boy Williamson, Howlin' Wolf, Mr. Lockwood, and B. B. King all called West Memphis home. Broadway Avenue/U.S. Highway 70 became the city's major commercial thoroughfare. Tourist courts (or motor courts), hotels, restaurants, and other amenities geared toward the traveler quickly sprang up along this traffic corridor. Most of the historic buildings we'll see today were constructed from the 1930s to the early 1950s.⁸

Chamber of Commerce Building

The first offices for the West Memphis Chamber of Commerce were located in a building at 216 E. Broadway (no longer extant), and the current building at 108 W. Broadway was dedicated on June 29, 1962.

Backing up a little bit...to southeast corner of W. Broadway & Rhodes (where Sonic is now)

In 1949 Fred and Zell Jaynes built the 1,025-seat Joy Theatre on this corner. In 1953 it was leased by Malco and renamed the Avon Theatre. In the late 1940s and early 1950s some of the theatres in town (including this one) hosted live stage shows that had been banned in Memphis, which caused controversy (burlesque and vaudeville shows).

West Memphis City Hall

The city's rapid population increase in the 1930s created a demand for better municipal services and led to the construction of a city administration building, which would house the city hall, a fire station, and a city jail. Prior to 1938, the city council meetings were held in various local businesses, and fire protection was

⁸ Smith, "West Memphis Commercial Historic District," Section 8; Stockley, "Crittenden County," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*; Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, "West Memphis," maps (1930, 1938, 1949); Terry Buckalew, "'Steady Rolling Man': Arkansas Bluesman Robert 'Junior' Lockwood," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 75-89; *The WPA Guide to 1930s Arkansas*, with an introduction by Elliott West (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1987): 222.

weak at best. In 1930 West Memphis still relied on Memphis for its fire protection, and by 1938 there was one fire truck in West Memphis with a part-time crew.⁹

The West Memphis City Hall was built during the Great Depression, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs were distributing mass amounts of federal aid to put people to work on projects that would benefit the general public and stimulate the local economy. The June 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) established the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works or the Public Works Administration (PWA).¹⁰

The PWA initially approved a \$16,500 loan and a \$13,500 grant for the West Memphis City Hall project and later approved another \$14,000 grant. A city ordinance was passed to issue bonds for the remaining construction costs. R. D. Eberdt was the architect and engineer for the project. Construction began on July 29, 1938, with a crew of fifty people. The city hall was completed on June 13, 1939, and officially opened on July 18, 1939. The city jail was ready for occupation in August, and the first city council meeting was held in the building on September 3, 1939.¹¹

During the World War II years, transportation of soldiers and goods on the roads, river, and rail lines in the area created a greater need for lodging and human services. Construction of a second automobile bridge across the Mississippi River in 1949 created another influx of automobile traffic through West Memphis.¹²

To accommodate the growing population, a courtroom addition was constructed in 1954-1955 on the West Memphis City Hall. A jail annex was constructed in 1960-1961. The West Memphis City Hall is now known as the O. I. Bollinger Building, named in honor of a 33-year city council member, and houses municipal court and a police dispatch station.¹³

⁹ Information submitted by Deborah Griggs, Executive Director, Main Street West Memphis; in the files of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (2005); Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, "West Memphis," maps (1930, 1938).

¹⁰ Holly Hope, "'An Ambition to be Preferred': New Deal Recovery Efforts in Arkansas, 1933-1943." From the files of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (2006): 23-24; Franklin D. Roosevelt American Heritage Center Museum, "New Deal Achievements," Internet; available from http://www.fdrheritage.org/new_deal.htm. Accessed 12 November 2008; Silva, "Joseph Taylor Robinson Memorial Auditorium," 130-133.

¹¹ Information submitted by Deborah Griggs, Executive Director, Main Street West Memphis; in the files of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (2005).

¹² Smith, "West Memphis Commercial Historic District," Section 8; Mills, "Memphis and Arkansas Bridge," Section 8; Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, "West Memphis," maps (1930, 1938, 1949).

¹³ Information submitted by Deborah Griggs, Executive Director, Main Street West Memphis; in the files of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (2005).

Broadway—U.S. Highway 70 or Broadway started off as a 2-lane dirt road in 1917. It was graveled in 1918-1919 and paved in 1926. The old U.S. Hwy. 61 or Missouri St. was also cleared in 1917. It was graveled in 1921 and paved in 1922. Both roads have gradually gone from 2 to 4-lane and then to 5-lane. Missouri St. serves as the dividing line between west and east Broadway. West Broadway was sparsely developed before 1950. In fact, the area does not appear on Sanborn Fire Insurance maps until 1949, and even then, it only shows W. Broadway out to Redding. We'll talk about the south side of Broadway as we go east, and when we turn around at 14th Street to head back west, we'll talk about the north side of Broadway.

100 block of W. Broadway (south side of street)

By the mid-1930s, there was an 8-unit motor court back behind AutoZone. It was owned by R. G. Hobbs and called Camp Delight—no longer there. By 1949 there was a filling station on the southwest corner of Broadway and Missouri (or S. Woods). Filling station demolished a few years ago.

East Broadway

South side of 100 block going east:

The Broadway Building was built about 1935 and in the late 1940s, it housed a furniture store that sold Philco radios as well as the post office in the corner storefront. There were historic buildings on the west side of the Broadway Building going all the way back to the corner of Broadway & Missouri, but they have been taken out to make room for the Shell station. These other buildings probably dated from the mid-1930s and the storefronts just to the west of the Broadway Building housed the Wonder City Restaurant. You can still see the old Wonder City sign in front of the Broadway Building—it has been moved down the sidewalk from its original location in front of the restaurant. I found a postcard from 1956 with an interior photo of the Wonder City Restaurant that reads, "Wonder City Café, West Memphis, Ark. The Gateway to the Wonder State. Serving the Finest Foods in the Land. Established 1937. Private Dining Rooms for Parties."

About 1935 First Street extended south from Broadway.

200 block:

Johnson's Auto Company, a Ford dealership owned by J. C. Johnson, was located at the southeast corner of First & Broadway. It opened in 1924 and was the first auto dealership in West Memphis. It had a filling station out front. The building was demolished in 1979.

The lot just east of the Ford dealership was used for auto sales (so it was a place to park vehicles for sale).

In the current Regions Bank parking lot there used to be a large building that housed a steam laundry and dry cleaning business. It was run by the Bledsoe family.

Regions Bank—Built about 1945 and always had the 2-story portion with 1-story portion to east. KWEM (later KWAM) Radio was housed in the west side of this building, and the east side was Merchants & Planters Bank (later First National Bank and now Regions Bank). KWEM Radio started in 1946 in West Memphis and went on air for the first time on February 23, 1947. In 1960 the station was sold and became KWAM Radio.

In 1948 Chester Arthur Burnett, better known as “Howlin’ Wolf,” moved to West Memphis and worked in a local factory. But he was really drawn here by the city’s blues clubs—he played the clubs at night and had his own show here at KWEM Radio. His radio show caught the attention of record producer Sam Phillips in Memphis, and Howlin’ Wolf soon signed with Chess Records. He moved to Chicago in 1952 and went on to perform throughout the U.S. and Europe. He died in 1976 and in 1980 was inducted into the Blues Foundation Hall of Fame and in 1991 the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Local merchant and musician Danny Craft also has a connection to KWEM Radio. His father, also named Danny Craft, had a radio show on KWEM with his band, Delta Dan and the Swamp Riders, during the same time period that Howlin’ Wolf was there. The elder Danny Craft later played in a band called Danny Craft and the Craftsmen (the music trail sign is wrong—his KWEM show was with the Swamp Riders).

300 block:

Jackson Howell & Associates and the Store for Men—these 4 storefronts were here by about 1935 but have been altered. The Toggery was in one of these storefronts. Photos from about 1930 show two buildings about where the Carrera glass building is now—the one on the right (west) was the West Memphis

Cleaners, and the one on the left (east) was a grocery store. There was an open parking area to the east of the grocery, and then there was a house with rooms for rent.

The whole eastern side of this block contained historic buildings until 1987, when they were destroyed by a tornado. Historically, a car dealership, meat market, furniture store, and cotton factor (sold cotton for planters and in return, received a commission on the sales) occupied the buildings on this site. The 2-story Bragg Building (built 1929) and 2-story Broadway Building (built 1933) were in this block. They both housed office space on the first floor and residential space on the second floor. Now Advance Auto Parts.

The south side of this block had several large industries, including the Walin, Dickey & Rich Lumber Company, the Mid-South Oil Company, and the West Memphis Lumber & Supply Company.

400 block:

In the late 1930s and 1940s, there were a few commercial buildings on this block. There was an agricultural implement business on the southeast corner of Broadway & 4th Street, which later became an automobile sales and service center with a filling station out front. And there were a couple stores scattered throughout the rest of the block, but nothing remains now.

500 block:

The brick building at the southwest corner of E. Broadway and the RR tracks was built about 1923 as part of the Federal Compress & Warehouse Company, which began its operations on the east side of the tracks in the 600 block in 1923. The 1930 Sanborn map shows this as a flour and feed warehouse, it is listed as vacant in 1938, and then in 1949 it was a seed warehouse and seed cleaning operation. This building also served as the freight depot. In addition, the 1930 Sanborn shows a small passenger depot just to the east side of the tracks; it is later labeled a freight depot. It was demolished a few years ago.

Cross the St. Louis & San Francisco RR tracks (known as “Fricso” RR)—now the Burlington Northern Santa Fe route.

600 block:

The Federal Compress & Warehouse Company opened in 1923 in the 600 block south of E. Broadway. When it opened, the Federal Compress & Warehouse Co. was Arkansas's largest cotton compress with a capacity of 165,000 bales. The company had its own water and electrical plants. In fact, because the company had its own well and storage tank, the Federal Compress & Warehouse Co. provided the city's first water mains along E. Broadway as a public service. The company sustained at least 2 major fires—one in 1939 and another in 1972. In the 1960s it was purchased by Southwestern, Inc., and most of the buildings were demolished in 1980. However, you can still see some of the original warehouse if you look closely at the flea market building.

The water tower dates from about 1923 when the Federal Cotton Compress was built. Cosgrove Insurance looks like it was built about 1955.

West Memphis Commercial Historic District (700-900 blocks of E. Broadway retain the greatest historic integrity)

Unique features about these 3 blocks—several buildings have rounded corners and beveled corner entrances. Many buildings feature minimal Art Deco detailing in cast-concrete cornices on their storefronts. And there are small separations between buildings; sometimes a false wall is built to connect two separate buildings on the sidewalk façade. That is not typical—usually buildings are built right next to each other and sometimes share an interior wall or have a firewall.

700 block:

701-703 E. Broadway—built about 1949. 701 storefront housed Aviotti's Grocery, run by Pete Aviotti and his son, Johnny. Louis Bambouchi later bought the store and had his butcher shop there until 2004. 703 storefront was Mike's Army Surplus, operated by Mike and Sadie Levitch.

705 E. Broadway—built ca. 1940. Paradise Gardens; sold cemetery plots to African-Americans (maybe out in Edmonston or Proctor?).

707-709 E. Broadway—built ca. 1935. 707 storefront (Coleman Insurance) was Dr. Ralph Hamilton's medical practice. He was a general practitioner. 709 storefront was Ellis Drug Co. (drug store).

711 E. Broadway—Tom Payne Building. Built in 1935. Weisburd Dry Goods, run by Gerald Weisburd.

717 E. Broadway—built ca. 1945. Was originally 3 separate storefronts. Later housed the Max Levy Clothing Store.

721 E. Broadway—built ca. 1949. Housed the Bargain Center.

South 8th Street—In the late 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, South 8th Street was called “Little Chicago” and “Beale Street West” because of its numerous night clubs, restaurants, and hotels for African-American clientele. On weekends it was so crowded that you couldn’t drive down the first few blocks of S. 8th, and cars were parked along E. Broadway for several blocks in either direction. There was a 9 p.m. curfew (or noise ordinance) in Memphis during part of this time, so musicians would come over here to play late at night. The West Memphis police chief was paid to look the other way...there were often illegal activities going on in the beer joints like gambling and prostitution.

Some of the 8th Street businesses were: Andrew and Louise Bass’s Be-Bop Hall, Lois Knight’s Little Brown Jug, Pimpmy Jones’s Pool Hall, the Silver Moon Café, Samuel “Tub” Irvin’s Brown Derby and Tub’s Place, Jack Butler’s Busy Bee, Bubba Wright’s Doll House, Miss Sweet’s Café, the Dinette Lounge, the Blue Goose, and the Cozy Kitchen.

B. B. King began his career performing at The Square Deal Café (sometimes called Miss Annie’s Place because it was run by Annie Jordan), which was located in the 200 block of South 16th Street in West Memphis.

800 block:

801 E. Broadway—built ca. 1938.

805 E. Broadway—built ca. 1930.

807 E. Broadway—built ca. 1958. Beauty shop built between two older commercial buildings.

809 E. Broadway—built ca. 1955.

815 E. Broadway—built ca. 1935.

823 E. Broadway—built ca. 1950. Maybe a car lot?

900 block:

901-903 E. Broadway (now City Food Market)—built ca. 1940. The smaller storefront at 901 was a restaurant, and the larger storefront at 903 was a movie theater. This was the Harlem Theatre, which was built by Jack Rhodes and was exclusively for African-Americans. The theater was purchased by Frank Ciancola and Stanley Fields in 1957, and they operated it for 10 years.

907 E. Broadway—built ca. 1942.

The large space to the east of 907 was historically unoccupied or used for junk cars.

923 E. Broadway—built ca. 1940. By 1938 there was a restaurant and filling station here, and the Cash Lumber Company was located back where the current motor court is now. The current buildings were constructed about 1940 as the Bil-Roy Café, Hotel, and Cottages. The main building had a restaurant on the first floor, a Mobil filling station out front, and hotel rooms on the second floor. There was a 26-unit motor court out behind in a U-shape. A postcard from 1943 advertised the Bil-Roy, saying it offered steam heat, a service station out front with 3 pumps, a private bath in each room, delicious food served 24 hours a day, and plenty of parking space. This is now the West Memphis Inn.

End of CHD

1000 block:

SE corner of 10th & Broadway—in 1938 there was a filling station here, and in 1949 there was a trailer court here with a central office building. Place to park trailers.

Next buildings were built after 1949. Not sure about historic use.

1100 block:

SE corner of 11th & Broadway—built ca. 1945. This was a hardware store.

Small blue and white building—built ca. 1945. Was a fish and meat market.

Remaining buildings not historic...

To the east of the Home Away from Home building at 1117 E. Broadway, there was a large 1-story building with at least 2 storefronts. Craft's Record Store was located in one side at 1119 E. Broadway until 1977 (or 1979?) when a fire in the dress shop next door spread to their building and they were both destroyed. The Crafts had a recording studio in the back of the building at 1119 E. Broadway with a music store and insurance business up front.

1200 block:

By 1938 there was a 2-story building on the SE corner of 12th & Broadway. It housed a filling station on the first floor and living quarters on the second.

Current buildings on corner built ca. 1955?

St. Bernard Dry Cleaners—built ca. 1945. Has clothes hanger sign out front. Building may have newer brick façade. Formerly housed a fancy ladies' dress shop.

1223 E. Broadway (Deep South)—built ca. 1945. Housed a furniture store in the late 1940s.

1300 block:

Car lot building was built after 1949. On the 1949 Sanborn map, there is nothing on this entire block until you get to the southwest corner of 14th & Broadway, where there was a filling station (no longer extant).

Bus can turn around in this lot before 14th Street and head back west to discuss the north side of Broadway.

1300 block of E. Broadway (north side, going west):

NW corner of 14th & Broadway—this building was here by 1938 and served as a dwelling and filling station.

There were a couple commercial buildings in this block and another filling station on the NE corner of 13th & Broadway (no longer extant).

1200 block:

NW corner of 13th & Broadway—may date from 1940s but not sure.

1216 E. Broadway—built ca. 1945. Had retail on the first floor and a hotel on the second. The Craft's record store (Danny Craft) moved into this building in 1965 and the upstairs rooms were still used for lodging at that time. Craft's later moved to 1119 E. Broadway (no longer extant) and later to their current home at 406 E. Broadway.

Other 2 buildings in block were built ca. 1955.

1100 block:

1120 E. Broadway—built ca. 1945. Notice the scallop detail at the cornice. In 1949 this was a furniture store.

Lifetime Muffler—new construction.

2-story Martin Buildings—built ca. 1940. Housed restaurant and retail on the first levels and residential space on the second floor. The 1-story building in the middle (Highway of Holiness) was built much later.

1000 block:

1016-1018 E. Broadway—built ca. 1947. Was the office for a car sales business.

1014 E. Broadway—built ca. 1955.

1006-1008 E. Broadway (The Storeroom)—built ca. 1945 but has new front façade.

Back into CHD

900 block:

920 E. Broadway (Ann Chapman's Outdoor Warehouse)—built ca. 1950. Has curved corner.

916-918 E. Broadway—built ca. 1942. Notice detailing at cornice.

904 E. Broadway—built ca. 1940.

900-902 E. Broadway—built ca. 1935.

800 block:

822 E. Broadway—built ca. 1935.

818 E. Broadway—built ca. 1945. Housed a wholesale candy business in 1949.

810-812 E. Broadway—built ca. 1950.

806-808 E. Broadway (Phillips Building)—built ca. 1935. Unique cut-out lettering on top of the parapet reading “Phillips.” Housed retail on the first floor and hotel rooms on the second floor. In 1938 there was a wholesale liquor distributorship in one of the first floor storefronts.

802 E. Broadway—built ca. 1955. Has new front façade and awning.

700 block:

722 E. Broadway—built ca. 1940. Parrish’s Accounting Service in the 1970s.

718 E. Broadway—built ca. 1935. R. H. Ray’s Hardware & Electric Store.

716 E. Broadway—built in 1932. Dan Little’s Little Peabody. Had retail on the first floor and rooms on the second. It was later the Long Hotel and then Fred Crabtree’s bookstore.

712-714 E. Broadway—built ca. 1945. Was a Western Auto store.

710 E. Broadway—built ca. 1948. Many of you know Alfred Saig, who runs Saig Clothing. Alfred Saig’s father, Sam, immigrated from Lebanon to Earle, Arkansas, and made a living as a peddler in the country. He later opened a small store. Then in 1955 Sam Saig and his two sons, George and Alfred, opened the Sam Saig & Sons Men’s Clothing Store in a building at 700 E. Broadway (NE corner of 7th & Broadway). When the highway department put in a turning lane at 7th Street in 1999, the building at 700 E. Broadway was demolished. Saig Clothing moved into their other building at 710 E. Broadway in December 1998. They had owned 710

since the 1960s and rented it out to various businesses, including an insurance firm, antique store, etc.

End of CHD

600 block:

Police Department—new construction.

Fred's—new façade on ca. 1955 building.

5th Street wasn't opened until after 1949.

500 block:

2-story red brick building at NW corner of 5th & Broadway—built mid-to-late 1950s.

Vacant lots

2-story buff brick building at 500 E. Broadway—built ca. 1955. Has interesting Art Deco-inspired cast-concrete detailing. Housed West Memphis Federal Savings & Loan.

4th Street was not opened until after 1949.

Car lot not historic.

Cross the RR tracks.

400 block:

Look through parking lot to west of Red Barn building (used to be a hamburger joint) to see the old Ketchum's Milling & Feed Company gristmill building at the NW corner of Thompson & RR tracks. Built ca. 1935.

Before any of these commercial buildings were built in the 400 block of E. Broadway, Miles L. Thompson's cotton gin was located here. Memphian Miles Lane Thompson bought 80 acres north of E. Broadway in 1918 and platted several additions to the city of West Memphis. In 1920 he built a cotton gin here on the

west side of the tracks. The gin was operated by James Franklin Graham. Thompson later built a wood-frame store to the west of the gin, but it burned, so in 1929 he built the 2-story brick M. L. Thompson building at 406 E. Broadway for his store.

412 E. Broadway—built ca. 1945 and housed a restaurant.

410 E. Broadway—built ca. 1940. Has decorative parapet. In the 1940s 410 and 408 housed the bus station.

408 E. Broadway—built ca. 1930. Decorative parapet with cast-concrete detail.

406 E. Broadway—M. L. Thompson Building. Built 1929. Cast-concrete detailing around parapet. After housing Thompson's store, it became a furniture store with living quarters upstairs. From about 1965 to the mid-1980s the city bus station was in this building. Now it is Craft's Insurance and music store—Craft's record store opened in 1963 and they started selling insurance about 1975. They still sell music equipment and CDs as well as insurance.

400 E. Broadway—built ca. 1930. Notice the finials at the corners of the parapet. The 1949 Sanborn shows a narrow 1-story building just to the east of this one, but it is no longer extant. 400 E. Broadway housed Parker's Café (still see "Parker's" in leaded glass transom under awning) and the first Kroger in West Memphis. Much later, Danny and Donnie Craft had a video store here before moving over to 406 E. Broadway.

300 block:

Vacant lots—there were several buildings on this block historically, most of which housed auto-related businesses. A large car dealership, used auto sales, auto garage, etc. There was also a 1-story medical clinic just to the east of the 2-story building at 304 E. Broadway.

304 E. Broadway—built ca. 1940. Also used for auto sales (maybe an office?).

200 block:

Lot just to west of 304 E. Broadway—toward the back of the lot—this was the site of West Memphis's first "downtown" hotel, the Hotel Crittenden. Memphian J. H. Horton built the hotel about 1925 (interestingly, Horton built the Plantation Inn

supper club in 1935 in the 3600 block of E. Broadway just west of Pancho's—was a popular hangout). It was later called the West Memphis Inn, and then in 1934 it was purchased by L. E. Turner and called the Turner Hotel. The hotel was demolished in 1941 by Ben F. Wever to make room for his Buck's Café and Wever-Riehl Motor Co. buildings?? Where were/are these?

A postcard from the early 1960s shows a streetscape of the 200 block of E. Broadway.

Vacant lots to east of 2-story building at 220 E. Broadway—

The 2-story Watkins Café building was on the east side of this block (probably where the tile is exposed). It burned in Dec. 1970. Then there was the Ben Franklin store (dime store)—also gone. Next was the 2-story building at 220 E. Broadway, which is still there. Then a 1-story building (built in 1936) housed the Chamber of Commerce in its eastern storefront and Broadway Liquor Store in the western storefront (214-216-218 E. Broadway is built on the site of the former Chamber/Liquor Store building). The Coffee Cup Restaurant was next—popular restaurant (Elvis ate breakfast there after joining the U.S. Army ~1958). The gable-roof building at 204 E. Broadway is partially on the site of the old Coffee Cup. Then there was the ice plant.

Wilson Power & Light Company Ice Plant

Built ca.1930, the ice plant was opened by the Wilson Power & Light Company. Later sold to Arkansas Power & Light, the utilities company operated 17 ice houses in the state, until getting out of the business in 1945. Sold to private owners Roy Morley and Vance Thompson, the business was successful because of its location on Hwy. 70. Renamed Delta Ice Company, Thompson and Morley, and later Morley's son, operated the ice house, which made 300-pound blocks in floor-recessed vats. The blocks were cut into 25-50 pound blocks and sold commercially and to individuals.

The ice house continues to be used for the production of ice, although the process has been modernized under new ownership. In 1982, the Delta Ice Company was purchased by Bobby Proffitt, who switched to city water instead of the natural spring well on site. Proffitt also modernized the ice equipment to make ice cubes instead of large blocks. Since 1998, the company has been locally owned and operated by Tom and Sue Burns, who continue to distribute ice to the greater Memphis area.

The Wilson Power & Light Company Ice Plant is one of the last, if not the last, historic ice plant in Arkansas still in operation.

Other buildings in 100 block from postcard...

The 4 storefronts with the green awning—built ca. 1928 but obviously have a new awning. The eastern storefront was home to the city's first bank, the Bank of West Memphis, which opened here at 114 E. Broadway in July 1928. The next storefront at 112 E. Broadway was Spott's Drug Store, owned by J. O. Spotts. It had a soda fountain and was a popular hangout. The next two storefronts housed various retail. Historically, there was a filling station on the NE corner of Broadway & Missouri by 1930. This particular building was constructed about 1940 as an Esso station (see sign in postcard photo).

Quickly look up Missouri to north...

The Crittenden Theatre was located in the 100 block of N. Missouri (104 N. Missouri—NW corner of intersection with Broadway). It was built in 1938 and was one of the finest theatres in the area. Ushers wore tuxedos. It was a whites-only theatre. The theatre hosted a weekly Bank Night, where people could win cash prizes. It was also the meeting place for the Roy Rogers fan club. Theatre is no longer extant.

Cross Broadway—back to West Broadway...

There was a filling station on the NW corner of Broadway & Missouri as well in the late 1940s (Texaco station).

The entire area north of W. Broadway across from the old City Hall was occupied by the West Memphis Gin & Supply Company. The gin operated into the 1970s.

Conclusion—

Construction on I-40 and I-55 began in 1950, and a small section of interstate from the MS River levee to Missouri Street was opened in June 1951. By December 1963 I-55 was opened all the way north to Blytheville. As motorists began using the new interstate highways, commercial and residential development shifted toward the interstate. Businesses along Hwy. 70/Broadway suffered as big box retailers constructed new stores several blocks to the north. Although Broadway remains a major thoroughfare in West Memphis, it is no longer the center of

commerce. But the heart of any city is its downtown, and there's still so much potential in West Memphis! Shop local and get downtown!!