

Bits and Pieces

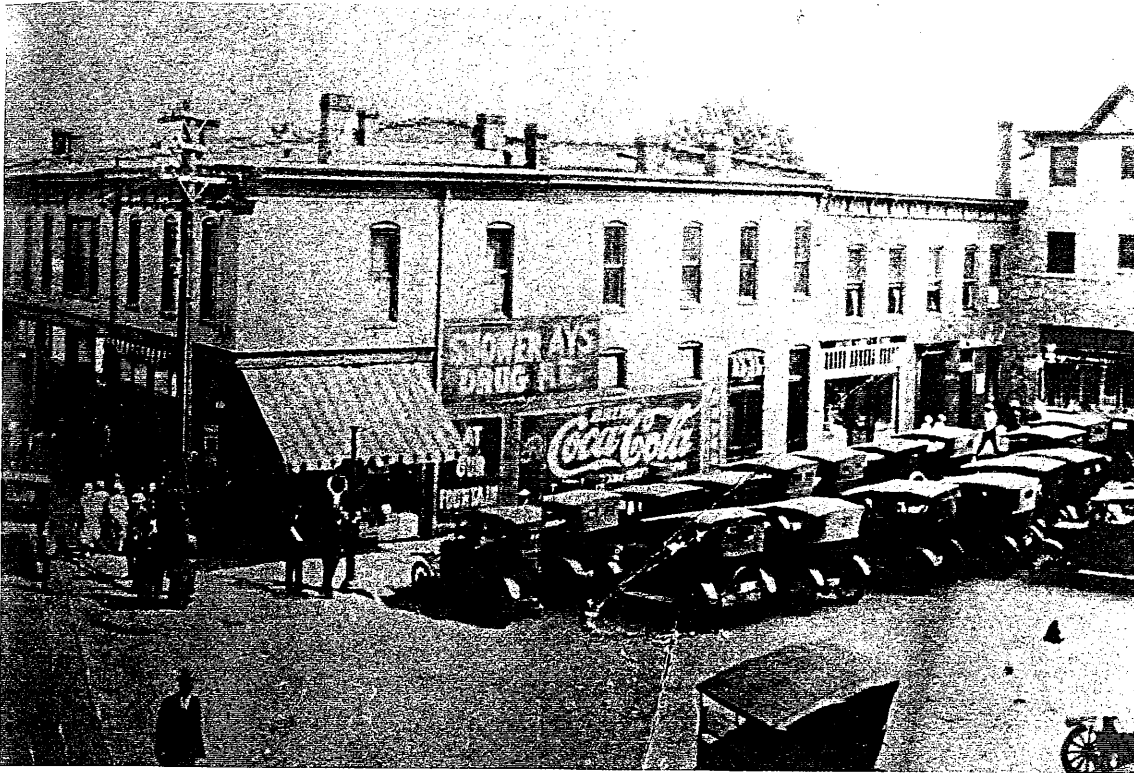
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Showers and Hays Drug Store, ca. 1924

SHOWERS AND HAYS DRUG STORE

When the doors of Showers and Hays Drug Store were locked on August 25, 1995, an institution that had been part of the business and social life in Elizabethtown for 103 years came to an end. It had been much more than a retail sales outlet. From the time it opened in 1892 it had been a store which attracted thousands of customers while serving as a meeting place and a social center for friends.

Showers and Hays was the successor to Green Bros. Drugs for whom Hugh Showers, the senior partner in the new firm, had worked as a youth. The store was located in those days, and for many years afterwards, at the corner of the Public Square and East Dixie Avenue. The new firm was composed of Hugh Showers and Horace Hays, with Mr. Showers always in active charge. It carried a large stock of drugs

and druggist sundries. Mr. Showers was a registered pharmacist who adhered to the strictest code of ethics when behind the prescription counter. (After being known as Showers and Hays for a short while, Mr. Hays sold his interest, and the business became for a time Showers and Sweets and later Showers and Phillips, Albert Phillips being a partner at that time, and once again Showers and Hays when Horace Hays bought Phillips' interest.)

With Mr. Showers in charge, the business had no set hours. He usually opened about seven o'clock in the morning and remained open until eleven o'clock at night, as much from a sense of duty as for the desire for profit. Hundreds of times he opened the store after hours for a physician treating a sick patient. He was a member of an old and prominent family, and he spent his long life in his native town. He was married to Miss "Allie" Mercer, theirs having been the last wedding ceremony performed in the old Methodist Church on South Mulberry Street.

Showers and Hays, throughout its business life, carried a large and varied stock of high grade merchandise, never resorting to cheaper wares or to substitutes. In addition to the pharmacy, the store carried a large inventory of patent medicines. It also stocked stationery. A variety of cigars and chewing tobacco was available. The manufactured cigarette had hardly made its appearance. Smokers bought a package of Bull Durham tobacco for a nickel and rolled their own.

For many years, Showers and Hays was the only place in town where new school books could be purchased.

One department of the business in which Mr. Showers took an especial interest was the sale of wall paper. He used a room over the store as a display room for his samples, and invited the ladies to come to it and see the new styles.

The soda fountain provided one of the chief charms of the business. It was large and

imposing, its bright nickel plate trimmed in onyx, and won many customers to the store. To many, the most popular drink was an ice cream soda, offered in a variety of flavors, vanilla and chocolate being the most popular. It cost ten cents. A "coke" or an ice cream cone for a nickel was popular with the young folks. Many a young man began his working days behind the counter as a "soda jerk."

During prohibition, Showers and Hays added "prescription whiskey" to the other drugs and remedies carried. During that period (1920-1933), doctors were allowed to prescribe a limited amount of "legal whiskey" (a pint at a time, with a required period between) for medication. Mr. Showers received a license and installed a large safe behind the prescription counter for keeping the stock. Business was brisk on the medicinal spirits, and many remarks were made about Mr. Showers being in the "whiskey business."

My first trip to Showers and Hays was undoubtedly while I was still in my baby buggy, and my visits continued every morning and afternoon until I started to school. My mother taught at the Elizabethtown High School, and Aunt Nina "kept" me (the expression "baby sitter" not having been coined at that time). The drug store in those days was the meeting place for the ladies. Every week-day morning about ten o'clock the ladies gathered in the "side room" to talk and talk and talk. I'm sure I've seen as many as twenty chairs gathered around one small table, with seven or eight separate conversations being carried on simultaneously. Suddenly, at 11:30, the ladies would scurry home to get "dinner" on the table, as most families in those days ate their big meal at noon, with only left-overs for supper. Some of the ladies I remember are Bess Alvey, Dora White, Minnie White, Alice Harrison, Helen O'Neal, Margaret Losson, Alma McFarland, Lettie Hart, Ella Hagan, Mildred Lord, Bessie Taylor, Belle Joplin, Mildred Gross, Nellie V. Hays, Virginia Marriott, and Martha Boone, as well as my aunt, Nina Richerson. Undoubtedly there were others.

The same crowd gathered about three-thirty in the afternoon and talked and visited as if they hadn't seen one another for a week!

While the ladies were gathered in the side room, most of their husbands and other men in town dropped in for a coke. That was the mid-morning and mid-afternoon equivalent in those days to today's "coffee break."

In 1938 Larue Cofer, an elderly bachelor with plenty of idle capital, bought Mr. Hays's interest in the store. Morris Phillips, a native of Greensburg, came to Elizabethtown in 1939 and bought an interest in the store, becoming a partner with Cofer and Showers. Showers and Phillips bought Cofer's interest in the business in 1945, as Mr. Cofer had never been actively engaged in its operation. Mr. Showers died rather unexpectedly in 1947, and E. Thomas Rogers, another Greensburg native, came to Elizabethtown and bought into the partnership with Phillips.

Three years later J. J. Newberry Co. leased the corner that Showers & Hays had occupied for many, many years, and the drug store was moved across East Dixie to the Woelpert building. After three years in that location, the business was moved to the building on the corner of the Public Square and North Main Street, and several years later, to Houchens Plaza.

The soda fountain with its white stools was disposed of before the last move, and was given to the Kentucky State Police for use at Trooper Island.

This is the sad story of the demise of a former downtown business to a big chain store with a large parking lot on the fringe of town.

M. J. J.

1958 - KENNY TABB A HERO!

An article in *The Elizabethtown News* in July, 1958, noted that Kenny Tabb, the 13-year-old son of former Sheriff and Mrs. Harvey Tabb saved the life of an 11-year-old boy at the Burnett's swimming pool in Elizabethtown a short time earlier. The younger boy, son of a tourist stopping at the hotel, jumped into the pool where the water was eight feet deep. He could not swim, and his mother, standing nearby, screamed madly for help. Tabb, who was also near the pool, jumped in with all his clothes on and rescued the boy, who had already gone under the water twice.

As a result of this incident, Congressman Frank L. Chelf, currently representing this district, recommended to the Attorney General that a Young American medal for bravery be awarded to young Tabb. At that time, under a law passed by Congress in 1950, the Federal Government could award four youth medals each year, two for bravery and two for outstanding achievement.

Tabb heard nothing more, and for 45 years he had wondered about the outcome of his nomination for the medal for bravery. Only recently, after an inquiry to the office of Congressman Ron Lewis, did Tabb receive from that office a copy of an article in the *New York Times* dated April 4, 1960, reporting that the Young American Medals for Bravery for 1958 were awarded to a Wisconsin baby-sitter and a young Connecticut lifeguard.

WILLIAM D. AND MALVINA CHURCHILL LANCASTER

Malvina Churchill was the second child of Judge Armistead H. Churchill and his first wife Elizabeth Crutcher. She was born in Hardin County on January 27, 1821, and died in the same on November 22, 1897.

At the young age of seventeen, she married William D. Lancaster who was born in Marion County, Kentucky, January 14, 1814, and died in Hardin County on August 22, 1890. He was the younger brother of Mary Elleanor "Nellie" Lancaster, the third wife of Judge Churchill. Thus, Judge Churchill was not only his father-in-law, but also his brother-in-law.

When Malvina Churchill married William Lancaster, she was converted to the Roman Catholic faith of her husband. William Lancaster's father had died about one year prior to the marriage of William and Malvina, so the newly-weds made their home initially with the widow Lancaster at "Viney Level," in a palatial residence on her 1000-acre farm in what is now Marion County. They continued to live there until 1858 when the farm was sold to Dr. John Lancaster.

In 1858 William and Malvina Lancaster and the three youngest children at that time, William Francis, Ann (Nanny) and Penelope, together with some slaves and some good thoroughbred horses from his Kentucky, moved by wagon train to Jackson County, near Independence, Missouri. At that time Independence was the starting point of the "Oregon Trail" and was becoming an area of thriving business. There he purchased several hundred acres of land.

Lancaster and his slaves built a large home, together with a large barn and other outbuildings. He engaged in farming, breeding of thoroughbred horses, and the lumber business. Lancaster's land lay mostly in timber; consequently, he purchased his own saw mill and cut, logged, and sawed these, thereby marketing a finished product, making a more substantial profit. In a few years he had become quite wealthy.

All this would pass, as a most unfortunate event was about to take place.

Even though Lancaster was an ardent southerner, he had never been bothered by Union troops. However, in the latter part of 1862 a company of Union cavalry approached his home, and the commander called for Mr. Lancaster. Coming at once, he was informed that he should take the oath of allegiance to the Union and repudiate the South.

Refusing to do so, he was seized and bound, and the troops fixed a noose around his neck, stating that he had ten minutes to take the oath or be hung in front of his family. Malvina, remembering that their oldest son, James Madison Lancaster, had graduated from the U. S. Military Academy a few months before, rushed into the house and retrieved his photograph in uniform and showed it to the northern officer. He agreed to spare the life of Lancaster, the father of a Union officer, but ordered them to leave Missouri, taking only what they could carry with them. Their slaves were then summoned and offered their freedom if they would leave their master. All refused and chose to remain with the family.

