

Kimball Historic Waling Tour (Scope: 1885 to 1920 – The first 35 years)

Business block between 2nd and 3rd Streets on Chestnut Street

200 S. Chestnut – Fraternal Hall is architecturally quite beautiful with simple classic lines. Unfortunately, the corner has been cut off, destroying one of the pair of oval ornamental windows which came from Philadelphia. The matching window has been painted over. The corner stone was laid on August 4, 1904, and the Grand Opening took place on March 4, 1905. Around 300 invitations were issued and a sumptuous banquet was served. Entertainment included local talent and speakers; an imported orchestra played for the Grand Ball.

The second floor was used by several fraternal organizations while the first floor, with a stage and a curtain, was the scene of theatricals, recitals, medicine shows, lectures, and church services. The first movies in Kimball were shown here and many high school graduating classes sat on the stage to receive their diplomas. Even public dinners were served in the hall, although all dishes, silver, water and stoves had to be carried in. Today the Fraternal Hall belongs to the Plains Historical Society and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

East side of street, going south

201 – 205 S. Chestnut – Points West Bank Building: The original building on this corner was built around 1912 and was occupied by the Bank of Kimball. For over 100 years, there has been a bank located on this corner.

209 S. Chestnut & 211 S. Chestnut: The 1-story building made of cement blocks and the 2-story cement block building next to it were both built in 1910. They are significant in that they were some of the earliest permanent buildings in town.

213 S. Chestnut – The Farm Bureau Office building was originally built as a garage. It had an old bubble head gas pump right out front. In 1911, it was a handy place to fill up the tank.

Back to the west side of the street

204 S. Chestnut - Suds & Mugs: This was originally built as the old Murray Hotel. It later became the Darling Hotel. From the beginning, a hotel was one of the most important buildings in town. The Wheat Growers and the Murray Hotel are the only pre-1920's accommodations left standing in their original locations.

206 S. Chestnut - The Wooden Keg: At one time, this was the Alden-Huffman Rexall Drug and they had a soda fountain.

208 S. Chestnut - Hometown Floral and Gift Shop and 212 S. Chestnut - Hometown Hardware: In earlier years, the Hometown Hardware store was the location of the Davies Motor Co. Because of this, the store has the largest elevator in Kimball County and it is inspected annually by the state and was state licensed up until 2013. Originally, the elevator was used to transport cars from the top floor to the basement service department and back up again. The elevator is no longer in use. Without public access to the basement, the store is no longer a designated tornado shelter. The common north wall with the building next door at 212 S. Chestnut made it possible for them to expand the retail area into the adjoining building for more retail space and add Hometown Floral.

The hardware business was first founded in 1885 by William Patrick Maginnis. The hardware started out as a blacksmith shop and evolved into Maginnis Hardware just up the street in the 100 block. The Maginnis family sold the hardware business in 1946. In 1956, the store was moved to this location. It is a family run operation.

214 S. Chestnut - Shear Images: The building was Burwell Furniture and Mortuary in 1931. It was very common to combine a furniture store with a mortuary in the early days, sort of a “cradle to casket” kind of operation.

216 S. Chestnut: At the **Eagles** location there was the Lincoln Highway Garage on the north end and E.A. Hyatt Implement on the south.

Walk down the street across from City Hall, east side of street, going south

219 S. Chestnut – Kimball Police: The brick building by the City Offices was built in 1915 by Dr. Melvin Markley, D.D.S. His first office in 1909 was in the parlor of his home at 508 S. Chestnut. He was a brother of Dr. L.R. Markley, a Kimball pioneer physician from 1885 to 1890.

223 S. Chestnut - City Hall: The structure is of architectural significance. It boasts a beautifully designed brick façade. An anniversary edition of Leslie’s Magazine praised the lost art of mosaic brickwork preserved in the Wheat Growers Hotel, the Municipal Power Plant, and the City Hall in Kimball, Nebraska. Mrs. Paul Mockett pointed this out in a letter to the city in 1971; and, thankfully, the plan to stucco the front of the city hall was abandoned and the original facing was preserved. The graceful fan windows have been sealed and the original ornamental lamps beside the entrance were vandalized and have been replaced.

227 S. Chestnut – The current **V.F.W. Building** was built in 1918.

231 S. Chestnut – The **Weatherwise Building** was built by Joe Gibson in 1928 and operated as a car dealership, the Gibson Motor Company. Originally, the corner was not enclosed and cars could drive through.

West side of street

222 S. Chestnut: The current **Vogue Shoppe** building was at one time the Piggly Wiggly Market. The Vogue has been located in 5 different buildings on Chestnut since 1925 and has had many different owners.

At one time, this block housed four different automobile/implement garages, three different grocery stores, men’s and women’s clothing stores, a bank, and the Fraternal Hall. The mix changed constantly during the first 25 years of the 1900’s. Most businesses did not last long or at least did not have the same owner for very long. There were many who started a business, ran it a while to build it up, then sold it, and went on to the next venture.

CONTINUE SOUTH, CROSSING THIRD STREET (HIGHWAY 30), THROUGH THE STOPLIGHT

300 Block of Chestnut

330 S. Chestnut: This home was built in 1909 and was known as the Hanna house. It has 1,641 sq. feet. (That’s big!) There is a story that the small front room was used for viewing the body of a deceased person, either inside or looking through the window from the outside. Note the carriage block

at the end of the curb so the horse-drawn buggy or carriage could be pulled up and the ladies in their long dresses could easily step up or down on the block to board or dismount from the carriage. There is another one at the corner of Elm and Fourth Street.

400 Block of Chestnut

400 S. Chestnut: This brick home was built by Berton K. Bushee in 1917. He came to Kimball around 1897. Due to his political connections, he was able to help get the Lincoln Highway to come through Kimball. He also purchased the first car in Kimball in 1907, a black jump seat REO. His daughter Bernice and husband, Frank Linn, also lived here. The small brick house behind, on the alley, was for the servants.

Going south on west side, the next three houses were built in 1910: 408, 416, and 420.

Iris Bickel (daughter of L.W. Bickel) married Frank Reader August 30, 1910. Frank had just bought the newly built house at 408 S. Chestnut along with the house just south of it (416) in which Dave Mathers the U.P. agent, was living. It was here that they started housekeeping. After 6 children were added to the family, Iris found the house too small and they traded houses with the Frank Linns who lived in the large brick house on the corner north of them. The Linns had no children and fit into the white frame house better than did the Readers.

In 1944, Frank Reader died and Iris with only her two youngest children, Betty and Frankie (Sarah), left at home, found the brick house too big. Once again, they traded houses with Linns and once again she was in the white house at 408 S. Chestnut. The house has been owned by the Reader family for 103 years. Iris Bickel Reader Rait also lived in the little house behind the Linn house in her later years.

East side of street

427 S. Chestnut - RODMAN HOUSE: This home is of architectural interest. The large, English-style house was built by W.S. Rodman in 1919. The house is now owned and occupied by the Bemis family (Bemis Drug). It is notable for its single-thatched roof (style of roof with the curved overhang) and its height. Since it has a complete basement and full-sized attic, it is really a four level house. Two small, arched windows on the high roof are known as "eyebrow windows." Aside from a modernized kitchen, replacement of all windows, and the installation of a modern furnace, it has been changed very little since it was built. The woodwork inside is oak and mahogany, and there is beveled glass in the interior doors. A wide oak stairway leads up from the front hall, and a back stairway descends to the kitchen.

500 Block of Chestnut

508 S. Chestnut - L.W. BICKEL HOUSE #2 was the only house on block at that time it was built in 1904. Remember the dentist? His first office was in this house in 1909. It was built as a spacious, two-story dwelling with two bay-windows. Outbuildings included a large barn with a hay mow and stalls for a horse and a cow, a granary, carriage house, chicken house, and a carpenter shop. There were also a windmill, a coal shed, and the inevitable outhouse.

A faint game trail ran across the property, made by wild animals going to the creek for water, and near the trail there was a distinct depression in the earth which had once been a buffalo wallow. Several lead slugs, such as buffalo hunters used, were found near it. There were a few scrubby trees, no grass, and the entire block was enclosed by a barbed wire fence.

519 S. Chestnut - BIGGS HOUSE: Across the street from Bickel #2. This house was occupied by the John Biggs family in 1894. Mr. Biggs bought three lots for \$500. This may have included the house since his daughter, Mrs. Fred Eichenberger, said he paid \$250 for a residence. The bay window is an unaltered part of the original house, which has been extensively remodeled. One old story says that this house was the "Pest House" at one time. This would be where people with contagious diseases were quarantined until they recovered or perished.

TURN EAST ON 6TH STREET

EPISCOPAL CHURCH: Three families from Yorkshire, England: Thomas Wilkinson, John Ewbank, and Thomas Dinsdale began fund raising efforts in 1907 for a church building. Typical fund raisers were box suppers, bazaars, and bake sales. The land was donated by Clyde A. Forsling. Mr. Frank Lynch was the architect and contractor. The cornerstone was laid 1915. Charles Tritt laid the brick and his brother, J.R. Tritt did the lath and plaster work. The stained glass windows came from the old St. Luke's Church in Kearney where their first Bishop, Rev. George Allen Beecher began his ministry. The first service was finally held in July of 1918. The parish hall, Knicely Hall, was built in the early 1950's. In the late 1950's, the tennis court was built to be used by the community. The Kimball Jaycees maintained the tennis court for many years.

114 East Sixth St. - L.W. Bickel House #1 (George Park House): One of the oldest homes still occupied, the house was built in 1884. It would have been built by George and Joanna Park (South Park Addition). They sold the property to L.W. Bickel in 1892. The house is unusual for its size and design, and has gone through extensive upgrading.

Iris Bickel Reader Rait recalls that while living in this house she played with Darling Biggs, a BOY who lived across the street, at 519 S. Chestnut. Darling's parents never got around to giving him a name. Therefore, you can understand why on the first day of school he told the teacher his name was Frankie. Can you imagine the teasing he would have endured if he remained "Darling?"

Continue east to Oak Street and turn north. Stop by 415 S. Oak, and look west.

CITY PARK This block was the location of the first Court House. It was an impressive edifice, completed in 1892. It had its own windmill which provided water for the building, as well as for irrigation. For many years, a custodian named Sam Richardson planted trees and flower gardens to beautify the county building. It was torn down when the present Court House was built at Third and Walnut in 1928. A small monument, a part of the thick stone foundation, marks the site of the old building.

415 S. Oak - BARRETT HOUSE: A.J. and Ida Mangan came to Kimball in 1908 on the U.P. railroad with their household goods and children. They lived in a large tent at this location until moving into the house. The entire family was involved in building this stone house. It was quite a project as four blocks were made at a time in a wooden frame, four in the morning and four in the evening. The basement of seven rooms was made first, then five rooms on the first floor and four on the second floor with a bath. Later a porch was added across the entire front and a bath on the first floor. The rooms were all plastered with what was called horse-hair plaster; later the rooms had wall-paper. Only three families have owned this house, the Mangans, the Hills (Mrs. Hill was Neva Mangan whose family built the house), and the Floyd Barretts.

4th and Oak METHODIST CHURCH: The Methodist Episcopal Church was the first church organized in Kimball in 1885 and they celebrated their 125th anniversary a couple of years ago, the reason for the banners. This is the second Methodist church building. Unfortunately, the original 1888 church building on the north side is in disrepair and will probably be torn down. When they outgrew the early church on

the north side in 1916, they built this cross-shaped church building. The beautiful stained glass windows were installed from 1941 to 1943 (WW II era). The ladies raised money selling jockey cap pin cushions. Several members donated memorial windows, those names are on the window. Also, in 1944, they installed the first pipe organ in Kimball. The educational building was added in 1952. During the oil boom, some grade school classes were held in this building until new schools could be built. At this time, the church had well over 700 members.

Lincoln Highway: As we get ready to cross **3rd Street or Highway 30**, we need to reflect on the historic significance of this street. From a dirt road for horses and wagons, it became a part of the famous Lincoln Highway, laid out in 1913. It was the first trans-continental highway in America. Extending from New York City to San Francisco, this national highway was distinctively marked with red, white and blue signs, each bearing a letter "L" on a white field. Where signs were scarce, utility poles were circled with red, white and blue stripes. The original Lincoln Highway (Old 30) went down Chestnut Street and turned west, following 1st Street along the tracks. There was strong objection in Kimball when the new 30 was proposed to follow straight through on Third Street and not detour past the two business blocks on Chestnut.

CROSS 3rd STREET GOING NORTH

213 S. Oak: This home, built in 1924, is a good example of a Queen Anne Victorian. Popular around the turn of the century, these homes featured the dominant front-facing gables and patterned side shingles. People have commented on the many lightning rods on this house. The current owner is not aware of these having any special significance, but they did. Older roofing shingles were usually made of wood. If lightning were to strike the house, it would most likely burn. Today's roofing materials are more fire retardant, which is why very few homes have lightning rods.

301 E. 3rd St. – Rite-A-Way Offices: The building at 2nd and Oak was formerly the Kimball Creamery. Mr. and Mrs. Soren Sorensen came to Kimball in 1914 to work at the Circle Arrow ranch, but soon after, opened a creamery in a small building. Children were fascinated by the fact that they sometimes worked in wooden shoes. In 1917, they built a new, modern creamery which was noted for its quality goods: milk, cream, butter and delicious ice cream. They were the last place in town to sell an ice cream cone for five cents. The business remained in the family for sixty years until about 1975 or so; the building now is converted into offices.

102 S. Oak Street - WHEAT GROWERS HOTEL: When it was built in 1918, it was handy both to the depot and to the Lincoln Highway. The builder was Frank H. Cunningham, one of the largest wheat growers in the state. Its 86 rooms were completely modern with plumbing, electricity, and steam heat. It cost \$100,000. It was known far and wide as one of the most elegant hotels along the route of the Union Pacific and the Lincoln Highway. Lt. Col. Dwight D. Eisenhower stayed here in 1919, when the Army inspected the National Highway and he referred to it in his memoirs. Although Mr. Cunningham's financial empire collapsed and the hotel was closed in the mid 1920's, it was soon reopened. The hotel finally closed in 1988.

The design of the building has several unusual features, one of which is that four air shafts provide both light and air to the inside rooms. From the lobby, an impressive marble stairway descended to the dining room and ballroom; and attractive twin staircases led to the upper floor. Over the stairway and in the lobby, were murals depicting the drama of the wheat harvest, painted by the senior Andy Borjeson. One mural over the front entrance, of a threshing scene, has survived. An inlaid sheaf of wheat is on the lobby floor. An extensive renovation project begun a few years ago is now on hold.

Some local people claim to have seen a ghost in the old hotel. A woman has been spotted standing in an upper floor window on several occasions. No one seems to know the story of who this might be. Another widely spread story is that during Prohibition, a tunnel from the kitchen went under the street and led to a building on the lot across the street on the east side. Supposedly, a speakeasy was in the basement of this building.

1ST and Walnut - EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH BUILDING - LOG CABIN: In the forties, the patriotism of the "War Dads" inspired the building of this beautiful log structure as a tribute to the US service men. It was to serve as a recreation center and a memorial. Service organizations like the American Legion, Veteran of Foreign Wars, and the War Dads used this building as a meeting place. Interest lagged and the building was sold. The Patterson family was responsible for cleaning the beautiful logs and restoring the building to its original beauty. Today, the Log Cabin has become the home of the Evangelical Free Church.

West side of Walnut Street - THE MASONIC HALL was the location of the old Linn Hardware Store. First, it was a small building until he expanded and made it the largest on the block. It was established in 1907 and long remained a business landmark. A baking contest with a Majestic Range as a prize was a big event. The Masons became the owners of the building in the 1980's.

LOOK TO THE NORTH ACROSS THE TRACKS

Take a drive by these buildings when you have a chance. You can see across the tracks the upper part of the house at 123 Front Street which is the one remaining relic of the Bay State Ranch. The oldest building in Kimball still standing was built in 1886 for the general manager who was in charge of the sale of the land. The company sold every other section along the railroad from Potter to Pine Bluffs for a down payment of \$7.00 an acre and 20 years to pay. This house was sold to J.S. Brady in 1910, a merchant who had bought the "Stone Store" downtown, and it has been a private residence ever since. The current owners have high hopes of restoring the home.

Kitty-cornered across the street, the Methodist Episcopal Church was built in 1887 on land donated by the Bay State. These donated lots were located in the original plat of Kimball. Bay State had big dreams of "growing a town." After the Methodists built their church on Oak Street in 1916, the building was sold to St. John's Lutheran Church who occupied it until they built their new church in the 1950's. Since that time it has been in private ownership.

TURN NORTH ON CHESTNUT STREET

The early businesses in Kimball were located on what is now First Street and then started pushing up Chestnut.

East side of street

101 S. Chestnut – OLD FILLING STATION / GARAGE: This was the location of the livery stable in 1908. It is shown as the Continental Oil Company in a 1928 photograph. At that time, there was a small section attached that serviced the filling station and gas pumps. This is the corner where the Lincoln Highway went west.

103 S. Chestnut - COMMERCIAL CLUB BUILDING was built in 1917. The current owner recently refurbished and re-tuck pointed the outside of the building. It has been the post office and the Holland Café. The Masonic lodge was upstairs and the Boy Scouts met in the basement. One story is that there was a swimming pool in the basement.

109 – 113 S. Chestnut - MAGINNIS BUILDING was constructed in 1917. Notice the bricks on the top of the building have crumbled and the wording “MAGINNIS BUILDING” has vanished. The north end of the building housed the original hardware store that later became Hometown Hardware. The flume factory was also in this location. Supposedly the “Flume Factory” was turned into a basketball court, at one time. Next was the Maginnis Café with the Maginnis Hotel upstairs. The south part of the building was most recently the Longhorn Restaurant.

West side of street

100 – 102 S. Chestnut: The large building on the corner was at one time Joe Gibson’s car dealership. It also sold gas. In later years, it was a Case farm equipment dealership.

The next few buildings going south on the WEST SIDE of the street have had many businesses come and go over the past 125 years. It appears businesses in Kimball were always remodeling, changing the front, or just plain re-building. The only original buildings still standing are the Vision Clinic and Lit'l Bit Country.

112 S. Chestnut - VISION CLINIC: was the second location of Dr. Moltkett office built in 1906. Little of the original building remains, but photos of the early office are in the waiting room.

114 S. Chestnut – Source Gas Building was the site of the first offices of KIMBALL COUNTY when it became a new county in 1889.

Walk up street to middle of the block, look to the east side

115 S. Chestnut - LARSEN JEWELRY: Mr. O.E. Larsen bought the jewelry store from R.E. Smith in 1926. It is the oldest family-owned business in Kimball at the same location. The original building burned down in July 1963. The Larsen’s rebuilt the building for the jewelry store.

LARSEN’S CHESTNUT STREET GIFTS: In 1985, the Robinsons (Larsen’s daughter and husband) purchased the vacant building next door and Chestnut Street Gifts was opened in September. As workmen removed a slate façade from the building, a marble facade from a prior renovation was revealed. The original front of what had been the 1918 Citizens State Bank also had elegant sandstone pillars. The new brick exterior features a striking brown facade.

121 S. Chestnut - MODERN PRINTING (WESTERN NEBRASKA OBSERVER): Before moving to its present location on 2nd Street, the Observer had several locations on Chestnut Street since it was founded in 1885. It is the oldest continuously operating business in town. The current façade of the Modern Printing building was done when the Observer was at this location in the early 1970’s.

123 S. Chestnut - The current **Java Blend** building was built for the AMERICAN THEATRE in 1918 with a slant floor and an orchestra pit. In the back room, the old metal pressed ceiling can still be seen. It was later remodeled for a ladies’ dress shop, and now the café.

129 S. Chestnut - Bemis Pharmacy: Early, this corner of the block was occupied first by HOTEL MARTHA which was replaced by the elegant WHITMAN HOUSE when the Lincoln Highway was built through Kimball. In 1917, W.S. Rodman purchased the Whitman, tore it down, and built the large brick building to house the new American State Bank. Bemis Pharmacy occupies the old Bank Building. Notice name at the top “Rodman Block.”

Back to west side of the 100 block of chestnut

120 S. Chestnut - Lit'l Bit Country was the first brick structure on the block, built in 1909. It was owned by Isaac Roush, a long-time postmaster, who also sold cigars, books, stationery, candy and fancy post cards on the side. He was an avid checker player and built a bench under a great cottonwood tree in front of the post office where the men from town put in their spare time. There were many of those old cottonwoods along the streets at that time. The post office was on the lower floor and he rented out the top floor.

Vacant lot on corner – STONE STORE LOCATION: The former Stone Store was built on this spot in 1894 by John Biggs (Remember “Darling” Biggs?) from stone quarried in a canyon west of town. The building was 116 years old when it burned January 2, 2010.

Early business seemed to change locations quite often, sometimes just moving next door or across the street and back again. The coming of the Lincoln Highway almost 30 years after the founding of the town brought great change. Downtown had such necessary businesses as a millinery and dressmaking shops, a harness shop, two livery stables, a cobbler shop, blacksmith shops, and a salt shed. There was also a chicken pen where you bought your chicken live and wrung its neck yourself. Over 100 years later, we have experienced many changes as businesses strived to meet the needs of our residents. As we look at these downtown buildings, not much remains of the original structures. Kimball is once again in a state of change. The future holds many interesting possibilities for the town.