

# Johnson City History: Some of the Downtown Buildings

“Dr. Bob” Gardner

ETSU, Department of Mathematics and Statistics

Yee Haw Brewing Company; July 30, 2017

## The Cherokee

**[Cherokee Lands]** Washington County, TN lies in the territory of the Cherokee Native Americans, the inhabitants of this area when the Spanish explorers first arrived in the 1500s. Nine historic Cherokee sights are known in Washington County, with the majority of Cherokee sights located in North and South Carolina and further south in East Tennessee. The Cherokee lost land to the European immigrants throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. The Cherokee supported the British during the Revolutionary War.

**[Cherokee Native Americans]** Though they were quick to adopt European styles of dwelling and dress in the 19th century, President Andrew Jackson (who briefly practiced law in Jonesborough in 1788) started the removal of the Cherokee from this region. **[INSERT]** The “Trail of Tears” was the forced migration of the Cherokee to Oklahoma in 1838–39; it resulted in the death of 4,000 Cherokee.

**[Cane Notch]** On the lighter side, Cherokee potsherds were discovered in 2012 at Cane Notch on the Nolichucky River in Washington County. Dr. Jay Franklin of the ETSU Department of Sociology & Anthropology is now directing excavation of the site, which dates from around the year 1500. A pocket of Cherokee still live in the Eastern Cherokee Reservation, which contains Cherokee, NC.

## Henry Johnson and Johnson’s Depot

**[Railroads Make Johnson City]** The East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad reached Johnson City from Bristol in 1857 and reached Johnson City from Knoxville in 1858.

**[Johnson’s Depot]** In 1854, Henry Johnson built a storehouse at the junction of the proposed incoming East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad and Stage Road which ran from Elizabethton to Jonesborough. He built a store, depot, post office, and residence. The village which Johnson founded became known as Johnson’s Tank and later Johnson’s Depot.

**[Henry Johnson]** On December 1, 1869, the state of Tennessee granted a charter to Johnson City. Henry Johnson was unanimously elected the first mayor of the new city on January 3, 1870. He died on February 25, 1874 and was buried in the Hoss family plot (off of Fairview

Avenue). In 1910 his remains and those of his wife, Mary Ann [Hoss] Johnson, were transferred to the Oak Hill Cemetery near today's Founders Park.

**[Johnson's Depot Historical Marker]** Henry Johnson was appointed postmaster of Johnson's Depot in 1857. **[INSERT]** The post office name was changed to Haynesville in 1859. It was reestablished as Johnson's Depot in 1861, and Henry Johnson became postmaster again that year. Henry Johnson was serving as postmaster in 1868, when the post office name was changed to "Johnson City," becoming effective March 9, 1870.

**[Where Was It?]** So where exactly were the structures built by Henry Johnson? In this photo, said to be from the mid 1880s on the Johnson City History Tour marker and said to be from the 1870s in Ray Stahl's pictorial book, *Greater Johnson City*, shows **[INSERT]** Johnson's store and residence, **[INSERT]** and the East Tennessee, Virginia, and Georgia railroad station. **INSERT]** The double chimneys of the Hoss House can be seen on the far right. Ray Stahl states: "The station, which Henry Johnson built... was built on the other side of the tracks and by this time had become the foundation of the Hoss House." [Stahl page 52]

**[Hoss House]** This is the Hoss House, built in 1871 on the original property of Henry Johnson. Johnson's brother-in-law, Elkanah Hoss, ran the hotel and after his death, his widow, Lucinda Hoss, operated it. In later years the Arlington Hotel operated from this location, according to Ray Stahl. [Stahl page 51]

**[East Tennessee, Virginia, and Georgia Railroad Station]** This 1886 picture shows the old wooden station on what is now Fountain Square. It was from the center of the station that the half-mile radius defining the Johnson City limits was measured. The station was built after the Civil War by the East Tennessee, Virginia, and Georgia Railroad and stood until the early 1890s, when it was dismantled. [Stahl page 70]

**[Pardue/Windsor Hotel, Arlington Hotel]** Since Johnson's Depot was built on the location of the Hoss House, and the Hoss House was at the location of the Arlington Hotel, then finding the site of the Arlington Hotel gives the site of Henry Johnson's original depot. This photo from the 1920s or early 1930s shows the Windsor Hotel (earlier known as the Pardue Hotel) and our target, the Arlington Hotel.

**[Quote on Arlington Location]** Sam Watson of the Johnson City Press, in a website titled "A Look at Downtown Johnson City Then and Now" states that the Arlington Hotel and other buildings once sat on what is now a parking lot along the railroad tracks between Main and Market Streets. Let's see how the old photographs support this claim.

**[Windsor Hotel]** Here we see the Windsor Hotel. In this high resolution photo, you can see the label "Pardue Hotel" and the construction date of 1909. The Windsor Hotel has always had a large sign on top which can be seen when looking west down main street. This makes it easy to find the location.

**[View Down Main Street, 1943]** Here's a 1943 postcard of a view looking west down Main Street at the intersection with Roan Street. We recognize several familiar buildings. . . **[INSERT]** And straight down Main Street, we see the Windsor Hotel with the sign on top.

**[Locations on Modern Map]** Here's an aerial view from Google, with the Yee Haw Brewery and Fountain Square marked. **[INSERT]** We know that we can site the Windsor by looking straight down Main Street. **[INSERT]** So taking this line of site puts the Windsor roughly where the Farmer's Market is today. **[INSERT]** From this photo, we can now confirm Sam Watson's claim and see that the Arlington Hotel **[INSERT]** was located at the south end of the parking lot at the corner of Buffalo and Main.

**[Johnson's Depot on Modern Map]** **[INSERT]** So with the Arlington Hotel located, we know the rough location of Henry Johnson's original depot. **[INSERT]** Now we can locate the sites of some of the buildings in this iconic photograph. **[INSERT]** The East Tennessee, Virginia, and Georgia railroad station would be across the tracks from the Hoss House and so would be practically in the middle of the Buffalo Street/Main Street intersection. **[INSERT]** Johnson's store and residence would be slightly down Buffalo Street a little closer to the Yee Haw.

**[Aerial view, 1940]** By the way, I also found this 1940 aerial photo. We can see that a sighting down Main Street **[INSERT]** puts the Windsor Hotel in the predicted location. **[INSERT]** The Arlington Hotel can be seen across Main Street in what is now the parking lot. **[INSERT]**

**[Painting]** There seems to be no photo of Henry Johnson's original depot building, but there is a nice painting by Ted Laws on the Johnson's Depot website.

**[What's This?]** There are some other buildings in the background of this photo. **[INSERT]** In the historical marker for Johnson's Depot, there is a nice, higher resolution version of this photograph. **[INSERT]** Behind the East Tennessee, Virginia, and Georgia, there appears to be a rather tall building somewhere around what will become the location of the Windsor Hotel. So... what's this?

**[...and that?]** The other photo on the Johnson's Depot historical marker is of Johnson's Store and residence. **[INSERT]** This is a view of the track facing side of the building. **[INSERT]** The building is recognizable for its distinctive decorative design around the eaves. **[INSERT]** There is a rather modern looking building visible in the background. This structure is likely still standing and is one of the buildings on the east side of Buffalo Street.

**[City Hotel]** There is another building visible in the background on the left of this image. **[INSERT]** In a higher resolution version, **[INSERT]** we can see windows and some protrusions from the roof. This is the City Hotel (later called the Peidmont Hotel [Stahl page 52]). In fact, Bob Cox had an article in the *Johnson City Press* just last Monday (July 24, 2017) concerning

a special supper at the City Hotel held one evening in 1886. The photo presented in Cox's article, as well as the photo on the "Johnson's Depot" Historical Photos, Volume 1 webpage is cropped and doesn't show all of the original image. [INSERT] But the Johnson's Depot webpage includes a link to a larger version of the image. In it, you can see the back of Henry Johnson's Store and residence, including a set of steps to the second floor which is vaguely visible in the picture on the historical marker. Bob Cox states that the hotel was close to Buffalo Street. Ray Stahl states [page 52]: "The walls of the building are still standing and are now part of the Free Service Tire Company office building." I *think* this means that the City Hotel is part of the building across the street from the Yee Haw on Buffalo Street. The other prominent building is the Hart-Range Saddle and Harness Shop and the photo is dated early 1870s (Stahl page 52).

## Fountain Square

[**Fountain Square 1**] Here we see a horse-drawn fire wagon in 1890 in the public square. Jobe's Opera House is clearly visible in the background. It operated from 1884 until 1905. The first regular movie theater opened at the opera house where "projectoscope types" were presented on hand operated projectors. The Unaka Bank Building is in the center.

[**Fountain Square 2**] Here is the "Lady of the Fountain" in Fountain Square, with the Unaka Bank Building in the center and the First National Bank on the left (where the Hamilton Bank Building is today).

[**Fountain Square Historical Marker**] A historical marker is in place today describing some of the buildings in Fountain Square. The Unaka Bank Building now houses Frieberg's Restaurant.

[**Fountain Square, Looking East**] This view of Fountain Square dates from around 1940. The Unaka Bank Building is left of center and the Hamilton Bank Building is right of center.

## Theaters

[**Main Street Looking West**] We mentioned Jobe's Opera House before. Another live theater was the Edisonia Theater. [INSERT] It operated from 1909 to 1911. [INSERT] In 1914, it became the first film theater in Johnson City and was renamed simply the "Edisonia." This was the era of the silent film. [INSERT] Across the street is the Majetic Theater with its original facade, [INSERT] which was later modified.

[**Edisonia 1**] By the way, *Lucille Love, Girl of Mystery* is a 1914 serial by Universal Studios consisting of 15 20-minute episodes. Of course, it was a silent film.

[**Edisonia 2**] By the 1920s, the Edisonia was renamed the Criterion. Around 1935, it was renamed the State Theater and was out of business by 1937, having had trouble adapting to the new “talkies.” Of course today, the Edisonia houses the Edisonian Brew Shop.

[**Majestic 1**] The Majestic opened in 1913, just across Main Street from the Edisonia. It originally ran movies, stage plays, and vaudeville shows. It had dressing rooms and an orchestral pit.

[**Majestic 2**] The Majestic was renovated after the second world war. Internally, the orchestral pit was removed; externally it was given a new marquee and a new, white facade. The larger picture here dates from Christmas 1958; the Steve McQueen movie *The Blob* premiered in September of 1958.

[**Majestic Historical Marker**] Today there is a historical marker at the former site of the Majestic on Main Street. It shut down in 1981 and was torn down in 1996. Today its footprint is where Majestic Park is located.

[**Liberty Theater**] In a July 2005 article, Bob Cox described the Liberty Theatre as: “The Liberty Theatre was the smallest and least pretentious motion picture theatre in Johnson City, yet the most evocative to area B-western movie fans.” It specialized in second-run movies, “shorts,” and serials. “Shorts” are brief 15 to 20 minute films; probably the most famous examples of which are the Three Stooges shorts. “Serials” were sequences of a dozen or more episodes, also around 15 to 20 minutes each, of a continuing story where each episode often ends in a cliff hanger. The Liberty opened its doors in 1929 and closed in 1956. [INSERT] It still stands and the original facade was exposed about a year ago.

[**Sevier Theater**] The Sevier Theater was located at 113 to 117 Spring Street. I’ve had trouble finding details on the Sevier.

[**Tennessee Theater 1**] Where the Bus Station currently sits, was the location of the Tennessee Theater. [INSERT] Opened in 1924 as the Deluxe Theatre, it held vaudeville shows, had dressing rooms, a balcony, guest boxes, and 1250 seats. It was latter known as the Capital Theatre, the Tennessee Theatre, and in its final years, The Capri Theatre. It was torn down in 1985.

[**Tennessee Theater 2**] We can date this photo given that the movie *Silver City* was released in 1951. Of particular interest to me, is that the Tennessee Theatre hosted the Three Stooges on October 25, 1947. [INSERT] Most popular Stooge, Curly, had recently had a stroke and the three who visited Johnson City were Moe Howard, Larry Fine, and Curly-replacement Shemp Howard.

## Railroad Stations

**[Aerial Map 1940]** Considering this 1940 photo again, we locate the familiar landmarks **[INSERT]** the King Center, the Sevier Hotel, and Fountain Square. **[INSERT]** There is an interesting building near the corner of Roan Street and Buffalo Street. This is the Southern Railroad Station.

**[Southern Railroad Station, 1913-1973]** The station was built in 1913. It saw the arrival in Johnson City of such celebrities as General John J. Pershing, Herbert Hoover, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Elvis Presley.

**[Southern Railroad Station]** Many of the old photographs of railroad stations in Johnson City are of the Southern Station. It ceased operation in 1970 and was torn down in 1973.

**[CC&O Depot]** George L. Carter leased the land from the Carolina, Clinchfield, and Ohio Railway (the CC&O) on which he constructed the CC&O Depot in 1909. Carter is also responsible for the construction of the Model Mill on Walnut Street and he donated the land on which ETSU sits.

**[CC&O Depot Before Renovation]** The CC&O Depot stopped operation in 1985. It sat empty for several years and fell into a state of disrepair.

**[CC&O Depot as Tupelo Honey]** In a big step in the revitalization of downtown Johnson City, Tupelo Honey opened in the old depot in 2014.

**[ET&WNC Depot]** According to the historical marker out front, this building, the East Tennessee and Western North Carolina Station, the “ET&WNC,” was built in 1891.

**[ET&WNC Depot 1930]** The depot served the narrow gauge tracks of the ET&WNC railroad, known locally as the “Tweetsie.” Passenger service on The Tweetsie ended in 1940 **[historical marker]** and the last run of the Tweetsie was in 1950. **[Stahl, page 203]**

**[ET&WNC Historical Marker]** The historical marker mentions the fact that the Tweetsie brought hardwood into the city, which helped fuel the Johnson City flooring industry.

**[Free Service Tire, circa 1960]** For years, this building served as part of the Free Service Tire Company. In fact, I had work done on my 1984 Volkswagen Rabbit done over there at the bar area.

**[Yee Haw Brewing Company]** Of course, we are here today to celebrate the second anniversary of the opening of the Yee Haw Brewing Company and Duck Taco at this location.

## The Giant Food Market Sign

**The Giant Food Market Sign]** In 1959 the owner of the Giant Food Market installed a 60 foot sign at the Commerce Street location. The store was successful through the 1970s. Pho-

tographs of the original sign seem rather hard to find, but this one is from the [downtownjc.com](http://downtownjc.com) website.

**[Construction in March]** In the late 1980's, U-Haul bought the store and put their name on the sign. This picture from March shows the sign as it appeared 4 months ago when construction work was taking place on the King Creek Basin project.

**[The Sign Today]** Just recently, the new sign was installed. The design is meant to use three stars to, like the state flag, reflect the three regions of Tennessee, west, middle, and east, and to pay homage to Johnson City's railroad history.

**[Another Look From the Air]** A final aerial look shows the location of the sign. **[INSERT]** In the circle at the top of the map, you can see the shadow of the the sign on the ground. **[INSERT]** Notice that Oak Hill Cemetery, the burial place of Henry and Mary Johnson, is located just on the other side of Founder's Park.

## Tipton Street

**[Tipton Street, 1924]** The photo is from 1924. Its a photo of Tipton Street, just across Buffalo. I found this on Sam Watson's "A Look at Downtown Johnson City Then and Now" JC Press webpage. The McCown-Mahoney Company building is prominently visible. Notice the "Delicious and Refreshing Coca-Cola" sign which is partially obscured by the American Meat Stall building.

**[Tipton Street Today]** As things appear today, we see that the "Tipton Street Pub" now occupies the McCown-Mahoney building and that the American Meat Stall building is gone.

**Tipton Street, Coca-Cola Sign]** This explains the dark line through the Coke sign; it's where the roof of the American Meat Stall building was. It also explains the different coloration in the sign.

## State Flag

**[State Flag and LeRoy Reeves]** The Tennessee state flag was designed by LeRoy Reeves in 1905. He was in the U.S. Army for 20 years and retired at the rank of full colonel. He died in 1960 and is buried in Oak Hill cemetery in Johnson City. The state flag flies over his grave.

**[ETSU and the State Flag]** In 2006, the first state flag (seen here) was on display at the Reece Museum on the ETSU campus. The historical marker seen here claims that the state flag was first raised during the dedication ceremonies of East Tennessee State Normal School in 1911. This historical marker was originally located near the National Guard Armory on the Jonesborough Highway, but currently is at Colonel Reeves grave in Oak Hill cemetery. The

claim of the marker is inaccurate, since the flag started flying over the state capitol in Nashville in 1909. ETSNS *did* become the first educational institution to fly the flag, but there is no mention of the flag's presence during the founding ceremonies.

[**Archives of Appalachia**] The ETSU Archives of Appalachia, located on the 4th floor of the Sherrod Library, currently has a small display of some of Colonel Reeve's original drawings of ideas about the state flag. The current design was approved by the Tennessee state house of representatives on April 17, 1905.

## ETSU

[**George L. Carter 1857-1936**] George L. Carter, the "railway builder of the Appalachians," was president of the Southern and Western Railroad that later became the Carolina, Clinchfield, and Ohio Railroad (the "CC and O"). He donated the 120 acres of land on which the state of Tennessee built the East Tennessee State Normal School. He built his home in 1909; it was located on the current southeast corner of campus.

[**The Carter House**] The upper photo shows George L. Carter's home with the Administrative Building in the background on the left and the National Soldiers Home (now called the "James Quillen V.A. Medical Center") in the distance on the right. In the lower photo, is the Carter House as it appeared when it was converted to a women's residence called Cooper Hall. It was razed in 1984.

[**ETSNS to ETSU**] The title of our school has changed several times. It has been called:  
**1911.** East Tennessee State Normal School  
**1925.** East Tennessee State Teachers College  
**1930.** State Teachers College, Johnson City  
**1943.** East Tennessee State College  
**1963.** East Tennessee State University

[**The Administrative Building**] This early view of the original Administrative Building dates from around 1911, shortly after its construction. It then housed all college classrooms and offices. The first cafeteria is shown to the far left. The Normal School consisted of the departments of education, English, history, science, languages, industrial training, agriculture, and the training school.

[**The First Football Team**] The first football team was coached by Professor William Windes and played in 1920. It had a record of 3 wins and 2 losses, beating Greenville High, Washington College, and Johnson City High, and losing to Carson-Newman (0-55) and Milligan (0-30).

[**Memorial Stadium**] Memorial Stadium was built in 1935-36 and originally held 1,200 spectators. The stadium was replaced with the MiniDome in 1975. Brown Hall is lower left,



Brooks Gym is upper left. The small building lower middle is Carson Hall, to be discussed more later.

**[Trolley Service]** In the early 1900s, Johnson City ran a trolley service. The school's first (free standing) library building (left) is seen on the left. It presently houses the Reece Museum.

**[Administrative Building Named "Gilbreath Hall" in 1957]** At a faculty meeting in March 1950, Thomas Carson motioned that the Administration Building be named for Sidney Gilbreath. **[INSERT]** Apparently somewhat contentious at the time, the idea was accepted by the "administrative counsel" on May 7, 1957. **[INSERT]** This building then became known as "Gilbreath Hall." **[INSERT]**

**[Desegregation in 1956 and 1958]** This historical marker is outside of Sherrod Library near Fred Borchuck Plaza. As the marker indicates, ETSC was integrated without incident in 1956 by graduate student Eugene Caruthers. The first African American undergraduates entered in 1958. They were Elizabeth Watkins Crawford, Clarence McKinney, George L. Nichols, and Mary Luellen Owens Wagner. Each of the five was a graduate of Langston High School, Johnson City's first African American public school which operated from 1893 to 1965. It shut down in 1965 due to the integration of Johnson City schools. A recent movement has been successful in preserving parts of the old school for historical reasons (it is located on East Myrtle Avenue near Interstate 26 exit 22). **[INSERT]** A view out of the 4th floor of the Sherrod Library shows that there are 5 radiant designs to commemorate these 5 important students.

**[East Tennessee State University]** Tennessee governor Frank Clement signed the bill renaming East Tennessee State *College* **[INSERT]** as East Tennessee State *University* on March 5, 1963. The name change became effective July 1, 1963.

**[Certificate Program]** The Department of Mathematics and Statistics introduced an on-line Graduate Certificate in Mathematical Modeling in Biosciences in 2013. The program recently had its first and only graduate... **[INSERT]** The Yee Haw's own esteemed Walter Witt.

### **[The Future]**

**[INSERT]** Of course it is well known that ETSU will play its first football game on campus since 2003 when they play the Limestone College Saints on September 2, 2017. Limestone College is a small liberal arts college of 3,500 students in Gaffney, South Carolina. If Gaffney sounds familiar, it is where President Frank Underwood from *House of Cards* is from. **[INSERT]** The ETSU Fine and Performing Arts Center, which has been under discussion for almost 30 years, is to break ground soon and set for completion in 2019. It will include an auditorium seating 1,200 people.

## 2019 Anniversaries

2019 marks several special anniversaries. **[INSERT]** In July it is the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 mission to the moon. Though maybe not so much of special local interest, though. **[INSERT]** April 13, 2019 marks the 150 anniversary of the birth of Sidney Gilbreath, the first president of ETSU. He played an instrumental role in the layout of the campus and in setting the tone for the first 10 years of the school.

**[Johnson City Sesquicentennial]** Speaking of 150th anniversaries, since Johnson City was chartered on December 1, 1869, then we can pinpoint the sesquicentennial of the founding of Johnson City! In 1969, Johnson City celebrated its centennial, and there are images of a few items I found online commemorating the centennial.