

Park Avenue first host to commerce in area

By Harry G. Ebeling

The Park Avenue business district is Oakwood's original commercial area and is small enough to visit for an historical excursion with limited space. It has been the center of activity for city business and safety providers, but there has always been business activity there. It didn't start out that way. It was just another street in the original 1872 Plat of Oakwood but starting about 1923 the shadow of commerce started to fall.

In December 1922, James Ake opened the Village Store, a grocery at 21 Park Ave. He offered "unfailing service and courtesy" and delivery in a Model T pickup truck. He and his family lived in the building and his children attended the Oakwood School. The building stood until 1941 when the DuPonts built the bakery/grocery store.

Across the street the first commercial building containing three store rooms was built in 1923. A Kroger store occupied #20 and remained there until 1939 when they moved to a new building at 2322 Far Hills (now PetMart). After that it became the barber shop of George Mann who later used the back room to train Golden Gloves boxers such as Gates Thruston and Ewing Stumm. Succeeded by Greeley Hatfield in 1953, who continued the bartering trade until 1984, when it was occupied by Classics Realty, Irish Crystal, a psychologist, Marks Travel, and now Kubik Fine Books.

The middle unit #22 for many years was a drug store, starting with Charles Froendoff in 1923 and Shellhaas Drug Store in 1924, who advertised "We either have it, will get it, or it never was." The grumpy Bob Parks ran the business from 1924 to 1939, followed by John Somerlot from 1940 to 1948, and Holsum Drug from 1949 to 1952. They all had pharmacies, sold perfumes, cosmetics, model airplanes, and had soda fountains which were a magnet for teen-agers. Then followed Fox and Frames, Classics Realty, Marks Travel, and Kubik Fine Books in 2006. The end unit #26 had a long run tenant, Oakwood Plumbing, until 1983 when it was followed by Party Planners, Classics Realty, Marks Travel and Kubik Fine Books.

There was a building at 30 Park Avenue from at least 1925 until the City Building was built in 1931, but no pictures or description of it seems to survive. My guess it was similar to many I have seen in small towns in the area with the downstairs housing the village fire truck and the upstairs used for offices which are listed as that of A.O. Davison, Attorney, Harry E. James, and John E. Morrissey (the latter being the fire chief).

The long six unit building west of the alley on the north side of Park Ave. was built by John Fletcher about 1924. #31 opened as Miller's Delicatessen in 1924, a branch of their main store on Ludlow Street downtown. It stayed until 1931 when Williams Market opened and continued until moving next door to the new building at #23. It was followed by a succession of dry cleaners until 1962 when A La Carte Catering moved in until 1967, and then more dry cleaners until 1978. Then came Children's Boutique, a beauty shop, a realtor, Shannon Boyd clothing, and now Stephens Insurance Agency. #33 has a history of dry cleaners, flower shops, beauty shops, caterers, realtors, and a dance studio. # 37 started out as a dry goods store, then Frudenberger Bakery, Werner Bakery, DuPont's Bakery, caterer, beauty shops, and then Winters Bank.

#37 holds a particular soft spot for Oakwood students, especially tuition students from south of town, because that is the location of Peterson's Confectionery from 1926 to 1941. All Oakwood students of that era recall eating lunch there at one time. Run by Orley and Edna Peterson, and later by their son "Pete," it was cheap, fast, and filling. It was followed by Engle's, the Luncheonette and Park Ave. Restaurant until 1964. Then came a dance studio and The Clothes Loft before the merger of three units into Winters Bank in 1972. After many years it was taken over by Larry J. Hayes Investment Advisors in 1998 and Merrill Lynch in 2003.

George Mann's Barber Shop was next at #39 from 1931 to 1945 before he moved across the street to #20. It was followed by a succession of businesses until taken over by Winters Bank. The end unit at #41 was Christ Episcopal Church's School, the outreach program to get St. Paul's established in 1925. The Oakwood Press Publishing Co. operated from this location from 1927 until 1954 when it was purchased by the K-O Times. Insurance and other offices occupied it until 1967. It was the Ice Cream Store from 1969 to 1974, Sweet Caroline's from 1976 to 1978, followed by a sewing/knitting shop, Enchanted Florist, Nanci's Fancies, Nanci's Small Planet Café, Nanci's Window Garden Café and Park Ave. Needlepoint Shop.

The parking lot behind the building had a large industrial building which housed the printing presses of the Oakwood Press. It later had an auto repair shop, the Wills Coal Co. garage, the William Johnson Fan Manufacturing and Mayne Products, a repair garage and an oil distributor, until the city purchased it in 1973 and demolished it for the parking lot. There is a planned update of the parking plan scheduled for spring 2009, designed to make it more user friendly.

In 1941, the Ake's grocery building and residence was torn down so that the DuPonts could build two units at 21 & 23 for a bakery and grocery. No sooner than it was completed than WW II restrictions on baking ingredients forced them to suspend operations. They sold the building in 1952 and it continued as Oakwood Bakery, Ross's Bakery, and Servanti's Pastry until 1983 and now it is the popular Ashley's. The #23 side was Williams' market from 1941 until 1960 and Meyer's Meats from 1961 to 1991. These were the last of the neighborhood groceries, offering charge accounts and delivery service. They were the lunch counters and fast food outlets for teen-agers and the last of the "dash in for something for dinner" places. They were followed by Just Music, The Purple Pig and Seasons on Park Antiques, and DeLynne's Beauty Salon.

We have discussed the Library/Little Exchange building previously which had a series of beauty shops from 1941 to 1952. So all that remains is the "Fletcher Building" built in 1954 at 49-53. This multi purpose building has been home to beauty shops, food brokers, doctors, dentists, realtors, the long time Park Ave. Secretarial Service, Park Avenue Antiques and after 1997, Daniel's Antiques. It has recently been purchased from the Estate of Jack Eichelberger and is scheduled for renovation. Across the alley is the professional building built in 1952 by Dr. Kenneth Arn, and which he occupied until his retirement in 1988. Since then it has been the law office of Judge Robert Deddens. On the other side of the street is the professional building built in 1956. This has always housed local dentists such as Drs. Booker, Eyler, Bush, Coyne and the Hermans.

So what memories does this listing conjure up? If you're an old timer, you remember George Mann, Pete Peterson, Bob Parks, John Somerlot, Nanci Schaefer, Elinor O'Grady, Domenico Stoflo, et al.

