

## NEW ALBANY'S OLDEST BUSINESSES

*A century is a long span for an independent or family-owned business to continue, yet New Albany today can boast at least five businesses which date back more than a hundred years. The story of the first business enterprises and the oldest ones still operating are the subject of today's historical program.*

Business enterprise in New Albany actually began before there was a New Albany. Mrs. Robinson's tavern and Josiah Trueblood's mill on Falling Run Creek near the present Pearl Street bridge were in operation several years before the three Scribner brothers founded the town in 1813.

But once the foundations of the future city were laid and newcomers began arriving to seek their future in the infant village, business enterprise began in earnest.

Just what business was established first is unknown, but very likely it was the cobbler shop of Henry Bogert who came over from Louisville to set up business about 1814 and fashion boots and shoes to order in the days before the ready-made product.

The first business establishment of any size seems to have been founded by Paxson and Eastburn in 1817. These two pioneer merchants came from Pennsylvania in 1816 and established a kind of general store, handling all sorts of merchandise. The store was on the southwest corner of Pearl and Main in the first brick building erected here. Like all of New Albany's early enterprises, Paxson & Eastburn did most of their business by

barter, exchanging goods for furs, pelts, and farm products, including farm-produced whiskey.

The perishable products were sold to the townspeople, the rest taken to New Orleans once or twice a year by flatboat and exchanged for more merchandise for the store. The profit depended on the shrewdness of the trading. By 1819 five general merchandise establishments of this type were operating in New Albany.

The first business specializations in the little town were in the lines of drugs, leather, meat and furniture. The town's first druggist was Ashahel Clapp, who also has a claim to fame as its first doctor. George Barclay, by 1820, was specializing in harness and leather goods of all kinds. And Levi Cobb, who set up business about 1825, was probably the first furniture dealer. Isaac Brooks and William Humphreys opened a hat shop about 1820. Those were the days when hats, like shoes, were made to order.

As New Albany grew and prospered, the old general stores gradually disappeared, swamped by the newer stores offering a wider variety of a particular product. Wholesale merchandising became an important business in New Albany, too, in the years before the Civil War. Strategically situated on the Ohio River, New Albany wholesalers supplied cross-roads and small town stores in a large slice of Southern Indiana.

Let's take a look at New Albany and some of its business enterprises 100 years ago in 1857.

William A. Scribner operated the State Street Drug Store, Peter Stoy was in the hardware business. C. W. Salter and Alfred Cox both sold shoes, ready-made by now. Ready-made clothing was still regarded with suspicion and A. W. Bentley, the tailor, had a booming business. Some types of these century-ago enterprises are in the limbo of forgotten thing.

There was Tom Williams Livery Stable, and D. C. Axline, the coach maker, and Valentine Graf, who specialized in saddles, harness and coach trimmings.

And in the list are five firms still in operation today – the Shrader and the Kraft Funeral Homes; the law firm of Johnathan D. Kelso, now continued by Robert A. Kelso and his son Robert R. Kelso; the law firm of Stotsenburg & Brown, now continued by John Cody; and David Goerlitz, tobacconist, now the Kaiser Tobacco Shop.

Enterprises which have a history of 50 years or more are numerous. Some of them are the New Albany Business College; New Albany Steam Laundry; Bir Lumber Company; Louis Harman & Sons, grain and feed dealers; John Morgan, the tailor; Stein's Shoe Store; the Grand Theatre; Owens Drug Store; Bettinger Coal Company; the White House; E. T. Slider Company; Rhodes-Burford, furniture; Tavern Hotel; New Albany Tribune; J. O. Endris & Sons, jewelers; and the Rockenbach Wholesale Drug Company, now operated by John T. Vie.

One hundred or even fifty years is a long time to be in business, but the longest business history record in New Albany is held by the Kaiser Tobacco Shop. This enterprise has been known by its present name since 1866, but it is actually much older – dating back to 1832 – 125 years ago – a pioneer enterprise still doing business today.