

FROM THE HUNTINGTON COUNTY HISTORY ANMD EDUCATION CENTER

These businessmen put their name on it

***Second in a series**

The History and Education Center, at 315 Court Street, contains a mural that is 19 feet wide and 8 feet high. It was painted in 2006 by Robert Fettingner (1932-2021) and depicts many of the enterprises on downtown Jefferson Street, circa early 1940s.

On the southwest corner is Sowerwine's department store at 302 North Jefferson Street and next door was Bechstein's Drug Store, operated by Adolph Bechstein. Adjacent to the drug store was the Geedy-Corey Hardware store operated by Ora Greely and Bruce Corey. For current reference, Sowerwine's is now a parking lot; Bechstein's is the Insurance Services office, and the Smith Furniture Store occupies at least part of the former Geedy-Corey establishment.

Last week's tale covered Sowerwine's Department Store, so we are now moving to Bechstein's Drug Store. Adolf Bechstein (1872-1960) was born in Germany and attended school there before moving to this country with his parents and siblings in 1883. The family came directly to Huntington from New York since relatives had established a residence for them.

Adolf attended the old Central School before working in the stove factory and eventually being a clerk in the Herman Drover Drug Store in the same location he eventually owned. In 1890, Adolf acquired an interest in the business and in 1900 he became sole owner. Except for the four years — from 1922 to 1926 — when L. B. Kerlin was a partner, Mr. Bechstein operated the business alone.

Mr. Bechstein married Ida Dumbauld of Union Township in 1906, and they were both very active in the community. Adolf was a 50-year member of the IOOF lodge, along with being active in civic affairs, other organizations, and St. Peter Evangelical Reform Church. Ida taught Sunday school at the church and was a charter member of the Huntington Garden Club.

J. Nelson Bechstein, who many will recall operating Bechstein's Grocery here for many years, was a nephew.

Ora Geedy (1875-1961) launched his business career as a clerk in the Reichenback-Wickenhiser Hardware Store in 1897. When Alfred Reichenback (1854-1921) died, Ora became a partner in the business, and it was renamed Wickenhiser-Geedy Hardware.

Alfred Reichenback was one of the early developers of Huntington as one of the organizers and directors of the Huntington Trust and Saving Bank and a director of the Huntington County Bank. A 33rd degree Mason, he was known for his business ability and enjoying the confidence of the entire community.

Geedy engaged in the hardware business for 51 years, retiring in 1948. He and his wife, the former Lulu Rupert, eventually bought a home in Florida.

In its heyday, if you hurried to Wickenhiser-Geedy, the new Maytag washing might still be available for \$49.50. You could get there on 15-cents-a-gallon gas for your new \$777 Oldsmobile.

F. E. Wickenhiser (1861-1930) was born in a log cabin near West Mill Grove, Ohio. As a traveling hardware salesman he met and married Miss Bessie Hewitt, in Huntington. Wickenhiser soon developed interests beyond the hardware business as a banker, manufacturer, farmer, and generous benefactor of Huntington's new YMCA. Bruce Corey (1861-1949) acquired Wickenhiser's interest in the business, and it was renamed Geedy-Corey Hardware.

It is known that a local contractor's new bride, trying to be helpful in his enterprise, heard him complain about not having enough "elbow grease" and thoughtfully inquired for some at Geedy-Corey. The contractor — being left-handed — then sent his bride to Geedy-Corey for a left-handed hammer. Neither quest ended well.

Geedy and Corey both retired from the hardware business in 1948. Ora and his wife enjoyed many winters in Florida before residing at the Methodist Memorial Home in Warren. A year he retired, Bruce Corey and his wife lost their lives a two-car accident on U. S.-24, about five miles east of the city.

Visit YOUR History and Education Center for a closer look at Fettingner's mural and many other fascinating exhibits.

— Researched and compiled by Dr. John Regan

Visit the Huntington County History and Education Center, at 315 Court Street, from 10-a.m.-4 p.m. Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays and Saturdays by appointment. More information on the Center's collection, tours, room rental, and how to become a member of the Huntington County Historical Society is available from Executive Director Barbara Rupley at (260) 356-7264 or www.huntingtonhistoricalmuseum.com



Bechstein's Drug Store, at left, and the Geedy-Corey store are shown in a detail from the Fettinger mural. Note the "reflection" of the Courthouse in the second-story window of Bechstein's.