

Vanished Market Street

By Hazel Lutz

Editor's Note: The following article was taken from Vernon Vignettes, vol. 2, a charming series of local history stories written by Hazel Lutz, Rockville native and one of the founding members of the Vernon Society. The map of Market Street was included in the original article. The images are from the Society's collection.

From very early days Market Street ran from 2 East Main Street across Brooklyn Street up the hill to 56 High Street. It served as the business hub of Tolland County until 1966 when Redevelopment obliterated it. This street crossed the Hockanum River at a point where the river cut a deep gorge between huge rocks. A stout keystone arch supported this stone-paved street and its stone slab sidewalks.



A 1908 postcard view showing the upper part of Market Street decorated for the Vernon Centennial celebration.

Down the center of the street ran the tracks over which the interurban trolley passed on its way to Stafford Springs. On each side of the tracks there was just enough room for a team of horses to pass. In the early 1900's on Saturday nights, this street was crowded with shoppers from all the towns around. The teams that came in were tied up all along the lower wall on East Main Street, for it was but a short walk from there to all the stores in Rockville center.

At the south end, at the corner of Market and Brooklyn Streets stood White's Opera House, a huge wooden structure that had once served as a church in Ellington. In its large hall all types of entertainment, including some of the first motion pictures, were shown. The ground floor in the front of the building housed several retail shops.



This 1908 postcard shows the intersection of Market Street and Brooklyn Street.

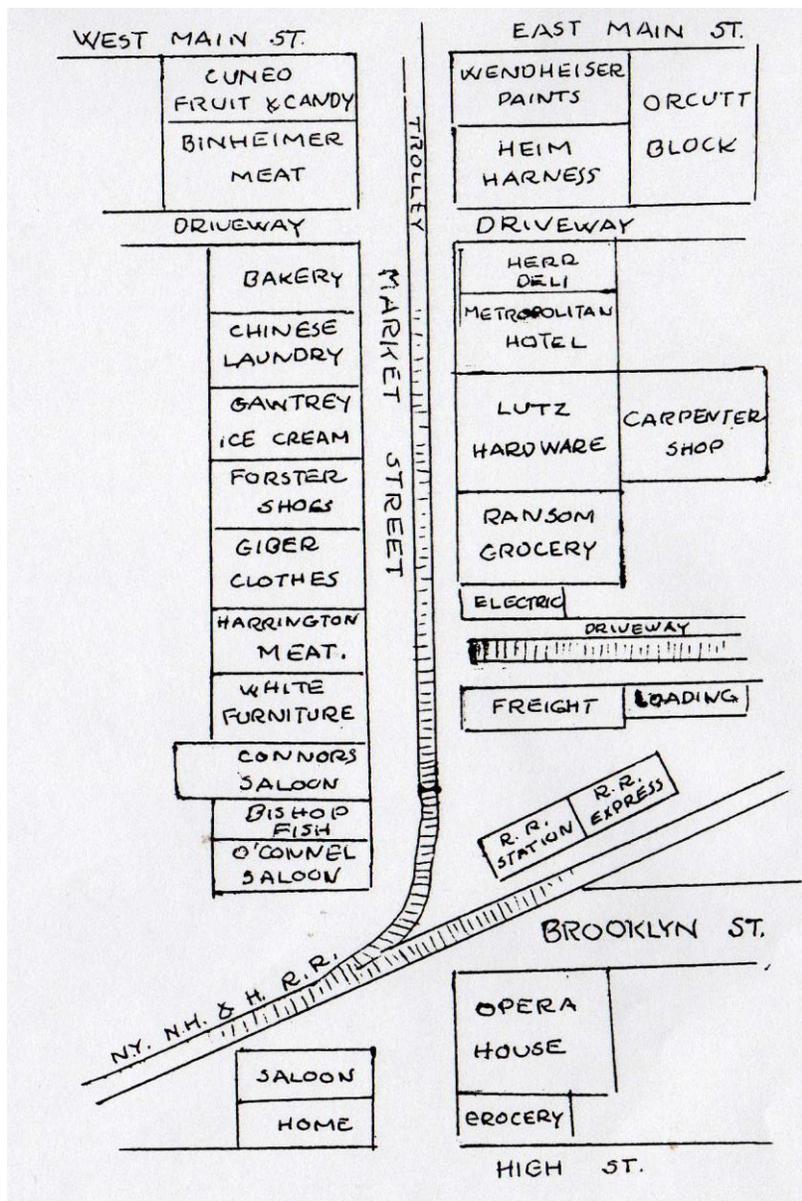
The railroad station is on the right side.

Across Brooklyn Street the railroad yard was located. The passenger station stood next to the road. Inside were benches for waiting passengers, a pot-bellied stove and a ticket office. The Railway Express Company had its office building next to it and a freight house along the tracks to its rear. Here all the cloth made in the local factories was loaded into railroad cars and shipped to all parts of the country. At the height of the woolen industry as many as six carloads, solidly filled with bolts of the finest woolens, left the station each day. As all the mills burned coal to fire their boilers, the sidings were filled with coal cars. The coal was unloaded into large wagons drawn by two horses. In the process some coal was dropped between the tracks. Many a child from homes near the tracks scavenged these pieces for their family.

There was but a single track from Rockville Depot to Vernon Depot, and as there was no turntable in the railroad yard, the locomotive had to back up to Vernon. Most of the freight cars came in to the station at night with bells ringing and lanterns swinging. During the day a flagman stood by the tracks where they crossed Market Street and halted traffic. This train was famous because it employed the first black conductor in the country.



A photograph taken of Main Street in 1911 looking across Central Park to the head of Market Street.



It was about 1914 when Market Street was at the height of its growth. At that time, next to the driveway that led to the railroad tracks and yard was an electric shop. Next door Orlando Ransom operated a grocery store that gave away Green Stamps and delivered orders to the homes in Rockville. Then came a large wooded block once owned by the Robertson family but at that time was owned by George W. Lutz. Here he ran a hardware store and a carpenter shop. Under the store, the river rushed and turned a huge overshot water wheel that furnished power for the machines in the basement shop. Window frames, sashes, doors, and interior trim for houses were turned out there. Over the stores were several apartments.

The Metropolitan Hotel and Herr's delicatessen shop were beside the woodworking shop. A driveway into the back yard of the stores on the boardwalk entered beside it. Across the drive, the four-story brick Doane's Block stood. In its Market Street level basement, Heim's harness shop and Wendheiser's paint and wallpaper stores did business.

On the west side of the street on the corner opposite the railroad yard, O'Connell had a saloon. This was followed by a row of stores, a fish market, another saloon, a barber shop, a furniture store, a meat market, a clothing store, an ice cream parlor, a Chinese laundry and a bakery.

A driveway to the rear of the Exchange Block separated a meat market and a fruit and candy store from the row of stores that lined the street.

A rare camaraderie existed among the people who owned and operated the varied stores. Once a year they declared a "Merchant's Day", closed their doors and with their families went to a nearby resort for a day of fun. They loyally traded with each other and if misfortune struck one, all offered assistance. Competition did not come before friendship.