

**SOUTH WASHINGTON STREET**

**INTENSIVE LEVEL SURVEYS**

## Downtown Owosso Historic District



**Address:** 111-13 S. Washington Street

**Site:** American Speedy Print / Big City Dogs

**Date:** 1885 ca.

**Status:** Contributing

### Description:

This two-story brick late-Victorian commercial building was built as a single structure, divided in half for two store fronts. The façade of the second floor reveals raised brick piers outlining the distinct addresses, with the six narrow windows grouped symmetrically into two sets of three. Uniting the two addresses as a single building are the unpainted façade, brick parapet, patterned brick frieze and rhythm of the piers and bays.

The façade of 111 S. Washington features one of the best-preserved street-level entrances in downtown Owosso. Above and around the minimally reworked entrance and display windows are an elaborate Victorian façade, inset with four original stained glass windows. If this feature was repeated in the building at 113 S. Washington, it has since been lost.

Two one-bedroom apartments occupy the second floor of the building.

### History & Significance:

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| 1894      | Louis Steadman lived above his cigar and wine shop at this address.  |
| 1899-1900 | Good Speed Bros. Shoes   |
| 1905-1921 | Pond and Hamper, lawyers, practiced from offices on the building's second floor.   |
| 1924      | Warren Peirpont, lawyer  |
| 1928-1956 | John Walsh moved his cigar store to this location from 102 W. Main, where it had operated since April 1904. He did business here until his death, after which his son, Harry Walsh, operated the store until 1956. |
| 1965      | Princess Dress Shop  |
| 1965      | Color Printers   |

1980 The Argus Press newspaper reported in its edition of July 10: “ John Walsh's Cigar Store is being restored by his granddaughter, Margaret Jane Walsh Barton and her husband David. Mid-Michigan Construction Company is the contractor and Elmer Manson of Lansing the architect. Mr. Manson specializes in historic restorations. The interior had to be almost completely gutted. The original interior woodwork was missing and had to be recreated.”

1982-present Speedy Print, owned by Greg Bennett, operates at 111 S. Washington.

2010 Big City Dogs, a restaurant, operates at 113 S. Washington.

**Photos:**



## Downtown Owosso Historic District

**Address:** 112 S. Washington Street  
**Site:** Nail Boutique / The Richardson Block  
**Date:** 1890 ca.  
**Status:** Contributing



### Description:

This three-story brick high-Victorian commercial building, three bays wide, features one of the most elaborate facades in Owosso. This façade achieves a strong verticality through its four piers; tall windows on the second and third floors, with the widest in the center; and transoms over windows on both floors, of demilune style on the third floor. The inset masonry panels between the second and third floor windows, fashioned from distinctive textured brick, further draw the eye upward across the façade.

A rusticated stone stringcourse serves as sills for the third floor windows.

Contrasting bands of smooth, cream-colored stonework, somewhat obscured by paint, span the façade above the second floor windows, acting as lintels, and above the third floor windows, between the demilune transoms and pattered brick lintels, serving as capitals for the four piers. Other masterful masonry touches include rusticated keystones set into the lintels and an expanse of textured brick, resembling rusticated stone, above the demilune transoms. The plain brick parapet originally anchored an elaborate wooden cornice, now absent.

While the first floor has been extensively reworked, the upper floors are unaltered and remarkably well preserved. Together with similar buildings at 115 and 117 N. Washington and 116 W. Exchange, these are some of the best-preserved and most visually appealing historic buildings in Owosso.

### History & Significance:

1890-1908 W. A. Richardson grocery store  
1908-1915 B. M. Dawes & Company, grocers  
1915-1921 William Finkelstein, clothing store  
1921-1938 Hornus and Hahn Clothiers

1924 Horace C. Calkins, restaurant (upstairs?)

1928-1931 Van All Chain Stores

1945-1980s Walter's Shoe Store

2010 Owned by Vincent and Dawn Gonyou

**Photos:**



## Downtown Owosso Historic District



**Address:** 114 S. Washington Street

**Site:** The Keyte Block / The Nail Boutique South

**Date:** 1890 ca.

**Status:** Contributing

### Description:

This high-Victorian building may feature downtown Owosso's most elaborate two-story facade, with ornate brickwork every bit as intricate as that of the three-story buildings on the north side of Main Street. Most remarkably, it retains its original street-level facade, with recessed entryway and wood-framed display windows.

This building was constructed later than its neighbor to the north at 112 S. Washington, onto the south sidewall of which the newer building was attached. The resulting sense of asymmetry is heightened by the fact that 112 is painted, while 114 retains its unsullied brick front. Restoring some balance to the facade of 114, however, is the ornate cornice of 114 that extends to the sidewall pier of 112.

The chief glory of the first floor facade is the horizontal band of textured, translucent glass block that runs across the face of the building between the brick sidewalls. Above this band of blocks is a wooden panel (a business marquee?) topped by a decorative wooden cornice molding that spans the width of the building below the second floor sills.

The second floor facade is divided into four strong vertical piers: one at each vertical corner and two more positioned between the three window bays. These piers stand in raised relief bordering shallow wells that contain the window bays and ornamental masonry. The central bay and window are larger than those flanking them on either side, with rusticated stone sills running beneath each window from pier to pier. The windows are capped by transoms which are, in turn, divided by mullions into patterns of squares and rectangles. Capping the bays is a wide, smooth bandcourse serving as lintels, running the width of the building and continued on the three left piers (although not on the one shared with 112 W. Washington).

Inset into the flat brick section above each window is a panel of the textured bricks which this building shares with so many others in downtown Owosso, and which are found even in the Westown neighborhood a mile to the west. Set several courses above these inset panels is a frieze of stepped brick ornament, three bricks high, increasing in size from bottom to top, culminating in a narrow band of angled brick. At this point, via a row of round-edged bricks, the frieze projects out to meet the parapet, which holds the wide wooden cornice that caps the building.

## History & Significance:

- 1892-1921 Moses Keyte, who may have built the structure, trades here as a harness maker, also selling robes, blankets, whips, trunks and valises. In its early years, the building also houses a restaurant run by Mrs. Abraham Donough.
- 1896 Cross & Harrison's Restaurant
- 1921-1945 Juhl's Tavern, presided over by Amos Juhl, includes a lunch room, billiards parlor and cigar counter.
- Home Furnace Company occupies the second floor of the building during a portion of this time, reflecting a shift away from coal and wood-fired fireplaces and stoves to central heating.
- 1948-1980s Irving's Men's Store
- 2010 Building owned by Vincent and Dawn Gonyou. Dawn's business is the Nail Boutique & Hair Salon.

## Photos:



## Downtown Owosso Historic District



**Address:** 115-17 S. Washington Street

**Site:** Risto's Bistro

**Date:** 1922

**Status:** Non-contributing

### Description:

This building was constructed of dark brown brick in 1922 for J. C. Penney Department Stores. A wall of windows faced west onto S. Washington, with a recessed center entrance. The building's one and one-half stories accommodated a mezzanine inside.

The façade is now covered in roughsawn wood, with exposed original brick painted to match. A two-story addition at the back serves as the residence of the current owner.

### History & Significance:

- 1922-1984 J. C. Penney conducted business here until moving to a new location down the street in 1984, one of five such new stores built by the company that year in an attempt to reestablish their base in American towns. The Owosso store has been consistently profitable for J. C. Penney.
- 1990's-2010 Risto's Bistro, a restaurant and nightclub with live entertainment, is owned by Risto Nicevsky.

## Downtown Owosso Historic District

**Address:** 116 S. Washington Street

**Site:** Freddie's Party Store

**Date:** 1895 ca.

**Status:** Contributing



### Description:

The presence of a thick masonry sidewall and projecting pier on the south end of the building, and the absence of one on its north end, abutting 114 S. Washington, indicates that 116 was built onto and after the structure at 114.

The first floor was extensively reworked in the twentieth century to provide large glass windows for the small grocery/convenience store which has occupied this street level storefront for decades. A large modern metal awning is cantilevered over the sidewalk. In the expanse above this awning and below the second floor windows, a later metal covering has hidden the brick wall, and any ornamentation or architectural detail, from sight. It is hoped that the original brickwork and details, including the sills for the second floor windows, survive intact under this applied metal covering.

The second floor façade features four tall window bays with separate bands of smooth stone lintels over each window. (This is distinct from the continuous band of stone, spanning from side to side, more commonly found among Owosso buildings from this era.) Individual inset panels of textured, beveled brick are situated above each second floor window, several courses of brick above the lintels, providing a nice touch of texture in an otherwise smooth façade. Beginning several courses of brick above the inset panels, a previous owner has covered the rest of the building's façade with another metal covering that extends up to the roofline, obscuring details, such as frieze and parapet, which may remain beneath.

Although only a portion of the original façade is visible today, what can be seen of the second floor, with its handsome windows, stone lintels and inset panels of textured brick, definitely contributes to the historic character of downtown Owosso. It is hoped that, with access to tax incentives, the owners, who have recently carried out an extensive, historically sensitive interior renovation, might be prompted to explore beneath the building's applied metal coverings.

### History & Significance:

1899            A. E. Willover Saloon, with Mr. Willover residing upstairs.

- 1905-1906 Gillette and Drown Saloon
- 1906-1908 Burt Nolan Saloon
- 1910 The Wildermuth Café operated under the auspices of the Wildermuth Hotel.
- 1914-1921 John Spaniolo, confectioner, made candy here from 1914. The Spaniolo Family, including twelve children, lived on the second floor above the store.
- 1921-2008 The family business, now J. Spaniolo Grocery, expands to include the sale of fruit and groceries in 1921. One of the children, Fred Spanuolo, continued the business under that name until his death in 2008. Fred sold groceries, fruit, alcohol, cigars, newspapers and other sundry items, seven days a week. He was an excellent source of historical information about downtown Owosso.
- 2010 “Freddie’s,” a purveyor of alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages and specialty foodstuffs, has been opened in this location by new owners Vince and Dawn gonyou, who have retained and rehabilitated the store’s oak floors, ice boxes, shelving, candy counters, walk-in cigar humidor, and other features original to the store.

**Photos:**



## Downtown Owosso Historic District

**Address:** 118 South Washington Street

**Site:** vacant

**Date:** 1875 ca.

**Status:** Contributing



### Description:

This two-story brick mid-Victorian brick commercial building is shorter and simpler than its more exuberant high-Victorian counterparts on the north side of Main Street. The structure's masonry sidewalls indicate that it was constructed as a stand-alone building. The building's dimensions, two round-topped windows on the second floor and their Italianate arched brick lintels suggest a construction date sometime after the Civil War. Indeed, the Dimmick House, on W. Oliver Street, constructed in 1873, features design elements remarkably similar to those seen here.

Surviving first-floor remodeling in the twentieth century are brick piers on both sides and a matching projecting pier near the left end. The asymmetrical spacing of these piers, defining a narrow area between the left and middle piers, and a wide section between the middle and right piers, visually divides the façade. This configuration frames the entrance door to the second floor in the smaller space on the left and the storefront in the larger space to the right. This unusual arrangement is explained by consulting old photos of the 100 block of S. Washington. The original building on this site was nearly twice as wide as the building that now stands at 118 S. Washington. With an identical storefront and pair of second floor windows located immediately adjacent to the south, centered on the entrance to the second floor stairwell, this building presented a balanced, symmetrical façade.

The second floor of the surviving building contains two wide windows and half-round transoms along with the round brick lintels matching those on the first floor. Each brick lintel is punctuated by a handsome stone keystone, and a stone feature is inset at the bottom of each brick arch, before the brick pendants start downward. Each window sits atop a stone sill. The frieze is simple, with a single row of projecting bricks forming a dentil pattern, surmounted by two rows of stepped bricks extending out to meet the low projecting parapet, only five or six courses of brick high.

### **History & Significance:**

- 1892-1895 Charles Gabriel Saloon
- 1896-1897 A. G. Sax Saloon. Sax operates another saloon at 102 E. Exchange beginning in 1899.
- 1899 Conrad Mehlenbacher, formerly employed at Estey Manufacturing, buys the saloon and lives upstairs.
- 1905 C. Hoyt buys the saloon from Mehlenbacher, who moves his establishment to 111 E. Main, living upstairs.
- 1907 Gustave Lueckermann takes ownership of the saloon.
- 1910 Earl Bellerbaum, soft drinks
- 1915 Mild C. Lathrop Dry Goods
- 1921-1976 John Spagnuolo purchases the building for his grocery store, which is still listed as Charles Spagnuolo Grocery Store in 1976.
- 1979-1990s Betty's Too Donut Shop

### **Photos:**



## Downtown Owosso Historic District



**Address:** 120 S. Washington Street

**Site:** Jade Buffet

**Date:** 1963

**Status:** Non-contributing

### Description:

This modern one-story building is constructed of blond brick featuring walls of large windows facing east onto S. Washington.

### History & Significance:

1963 The structure was built by Robert Brewer

1963-1983 ca. Sears Roebuck Company operates an appliance sales room and catalogue order desk.

2005-2010 Jade Buffet, a Chinese Restaurant, does business at this address. The building is owned by Thomas Symnington.

## Downtown Owosso Historic District



**Address:** 121-25 S. Washington Street

**Site:** Wildermuth Hotel / Indian Trails

**Date:** 1871

**Status:** Contributing

### Description:

Occupying the Northeast corner of Washington and Comstock Streets, this three-story brick commercial building features its main street façade facing Washington and a simple, unadorned elevation on E. Comstock. The main façade is visually divided into three sections by projecting vertical piers. The first floor, or street-level, façade has been totally reworked in the mid-20th century, but an indication of the original entry level design may be found in the simple yet elegant wood entrance on Comstock.

To the educated eye, the various architectural elements of this structure are somewhat puzzling. Lintels over the second and third floor window of the main façade are radically different, the bricks on each floor appear slightly different in color (this is especially evident on the side street elevation), strong horizontal lines are introduced at odd places, and the general proportions and design features just seem ‘off.’ When one reads that this 1871 building was originally two stories and only later (1909) raised to a full three stories, the differences make sense.

Some questionable decisions were made during the 1909 addition. The very heavy, Renaissance Revival pedimented lintels from the second floor were apparently removed and then reused to cap the new third floor window bays. On the second floor, the builder inserted long stone lintels in a design unique among Owosso buildings: extending from pier to pier, each lintel features a flat surface from which rusticated sections project, flat on the top and bottom but cut at angles on the sides to suggest keystones and lintels. These stone lintels are far too wide for the (modern replacement) windows that sit under them, especially given that the light stone sills are only slightly wider than the bays.

The original, second floor elevation features the aforementioned piers, and these piers are then repeated between each window bay. Another unusual feature is that the left and right sections are each three bays wide, but the middle section is only two bays wide on the second floor and three bays wide on the third. There is a pier separating the two bays of the second floor of the middle section. All this may well have been a product of the 1909 expansion, but it doesn’t help to create the balanced, cohesive exterior one expects from the post-Civil War era.

The builder of the 1909 addition did continue the four projecting piers (with indentations down the middle) from the two outside walls and the two interior support walls, but did not choose to continue the smaller piers between each window bay. Between the four piers, long smooth stone bandcourses were placed at the top of the original second floor wall to help mask the transition to the new third floor, creating a jarring horizontal line at an unexpected point. The third floor windows, with simple stone sills and the original lintels from below, are spaced three to a section and, although not precisely uniformly spaced, they help give the main facade some balance. There is a simple row of stepped bricks in the small frieze, immediately capped by another thin band of stone along the roofline.

The simple elevation facing E. Comstock is much more successful, even with the transition line between the 1871 and 1909 bricks. There are simple window bays, with simple stone sills and lintels, regularly spaced down the plain brick wall, with a matching simple stepped brick frieze. The previously mentioned original side entrance occupies the back section of the first floor.

### **Updated Information:**

The above architectural description addresses the three storefronts at 121-25 S. Washington. When it was written, it was presumed that this was a single structure. However, vintage photos have surfaced that show a mid-Victorian (probably built in the late 1870s) commercial building at the southern end of this block, at today's 125 S. Washington. The building at 121-23 was obviously built first, and then raised to three stories in 1909 (as is discussed in the text). At some point afterward, the corner building at 125 was replaced by a new structure that matched the façade of 121. The various architectural elements, especially the distinctive lintels, were matched so well that it is only with great difficulty that one can detect hints that the southern section was built decades later. (The brick used on the new section is a very close match to the older section, but just a little different.)

An historian for Indian Trails provided the committee with vintage photos that seem to date from 1916-20, with the bus line's impressive fleet of vehicles lined up along S. Washington. In these photos (one is provided below), the mid-Victorian corner building is gone and the three store gone and the three store front building we see today is present. Therefore, we can determine that the older building was razed or burned to the ground between 1909 and 1920, at which point the corner was filled with a new structure that was very carefully crafted to match its neighbors to the north.

### **History & Significance:**

1857 ca.-1871 John Rudolph Schnekelburger, a tanner, purchased this site when he came to Owosso from Ann Arbor in 1857. Here he built Sneckelberger's Hotel, a wood-frame eight-room boarding house that he operated until his death in 1863. His widow and daughters took over management of the hotel until it was destroyed by fire in 1871.

1871-1929 ca. The Wildermuth Hotel was built on this site following destruction by fire of Sneckelberger's Hotel, replacing the wood frame building with a two-story brick structure.

J. Fred Wildermuth was born in Wordumberg, Germany in 1841, and came to the United States with his parents in 1850. They settled in Buffalo, NY, where J. Fred learned the cooper's trade. [text?] continues the story:

“In 1863 he came to Owosso, and for the first two years of his residence here worked at his trade, then going to work in the old Exchange Hotel, where he remained for nearly nine years. After leaving the Exchange Hotel he started a restaurant where his hotel now stands, one year later converting it into a hotel. Mr. Wildermuth owns a farm only about one mile distant from the hotel and from this he secures all of his vegetables, milk, butter, etc. and the hungry traveler finds set before him a meal to which he can do full justice.”

The Wildermuth Hotel and Restaurant were widely known for their excellent fare and superbly furnished rooms. A typical menu offered golden plover, venison, roast beef, soups, a variety of cakes and pies, and nuts for fifty cents.

Mr. Wildermuth's wife was a member of the Sneckelberger family.

- 1909-1918 Edward Hoffman, son-in-law to Fred Wildermuth, took ownership of the hotel and enlarged the building into the three story structure that stands today, increasing accommodations by thirty rooms.
- 1918-1936 A. G. Berner purchased the hotel from Edward Hoffman and continued its operation until at least 1936.
- 1928-present Indian Trails continues to operate in this location as the downtown Owosso depot for its passenger bus service, which celebrates its centennial year in 2010. The company was founded by Cora and Wayne Taylor and Mrs. Taylor's parents in 1910 as a baggage transfer service known as the Phillips-Taylor Livery Service. In 1912, the families bought a Model T. taxicab, and the enterprise evolved into the Phillips and Taylor Jitney Service, located at 219 N. Ball Street. Both Taylors drove the taxi to transport automotive workers to and from Flint, and Cora Taylor became the first woman in Michigan to be issued a chauffeur's license. The Taylors bought their first bus in 1915 and rented space for their bus depot in the Wildermuth Hotel, growing the company into the Owosso-Flint Bus Lines and, in 1940, the Indian Trails Bus Company, which operates throughout Michigan and the Midwest. Indian Trails purchased the Wildermuth Hotel in 1952. The name of the bus company is attributable to Cora Taylor, who was a student of Native American history, and each vehicle in the line bears the name of a distinguished Native American chief.

**Present  
Photos:**





**Vintage Photos:**

