

The Beginning



Figure 1 – Meat Market, Built 1840s, Right Side of Photo, Horse/Carriage in Front

The first owner of the corner was **John Gilbert**, founder of Manchester Village, who acquired the property from the U. S. Government in 1831. The original 1833 plat map of Manchester indicates that a barn was situated somewhere within this land parcel near the mill dam. The second village plat (1837) expanded the village eastward along what is now Main Street across M-52, and provides the first reference to a “Road to Ann Arbor” and the current alignment of the “four corners”.

In April 1840, **John D. Kief** acquired the property and subsequently sold a small portion of it in October 1854 to **Dr. Amariah Conklin**. This parcel included a building facing Main Street “occupied by Cadwell & Austin as a meat market”. This is the first reference to a building occupying this corner, and may have been the “barn” referenced in the earlier survey. The only known photograph of this building is shown in **Figure 1**. The “meat market” building is the white, gable-roofed structure on the right side of the photograph, with a horse and carriage in front of it. This photo dates from 1878, when it housed Dr. Conklin’s medical office, two years before the building’s teardown and rebuild.

The Meat Market was first operated by **Ambrose Cadwell**, a butcher, and a second person named **Austin**. An inn may have also operated here. **Paul B. Minnis** and **Chauncey Walbridge** took over in the mid-1850s. The only other business operating in this building began in 1855 with the opening of Dr. Conklin’s medical office, with Conklin’s office in front and the meat market in back.

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Drs. Amariah and Ebenezer Conklin

Dr. Amariah Conklin was born in 1822 in Amenia, New York, the son of Dr. Ebenezer H. and Lucy Conklin. The senior Dr. Conklin moved his family to Sharon Township in 1832, where he practiced medicine and farming until his death in 1851. Amariah graduated from the Medical University of New York, and practiced medicine and surgery in Manchester where he “enjoyed an extensive patronage” from June 1849 until his death on May 25, 1892.

He partnered with his son **Ebenezer** in the practice of “Reformed Medicine”, also known as eclectic medicine. Though educated in the Old School, “they never approved of the use of mercurials, arsenic, blood-letting and other barbarisms in vogue”. They adopted the new methods of natural or holistic treatment, and were the only ones to do so for many years in this region of Michigan.



Figure 2a – Dr. Amariah Conklin

Major Development under John W. Cowan

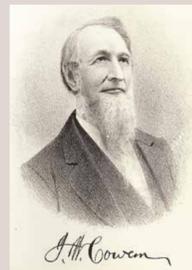


Figure 2b – John W. Cowan

After Dr. Conklin established his medical practice and the Meat Market continued in the 1850s–1860s, further development on the corner stalled until May 1861. John Kief then sold to **John W. Cowan** approximately 50 acres north of the River Raisin and west of Ann Arbor Street, wrapping around the mill pond and river north of the existing village. Cowan subdivided this land and entered his plat in March 1866, and begin commercial development in the post-Civil War economic boom in Manchester. Cowan enjoyed considerable success in Manchester as a trader, merchant, builder and real estate speculator.

A smoke house was constructed behind the meat market sometime after 1860. The lot north of the Conklin office/meat market was sold by Cowan to **Philo Botsford Millen** in October 1866 for \$50. Millen was a prominent blacksmith in Manchester. By 1870, he had relocated his blacksmith shop to this lot, and occupied a portion of the building as a residence for his family. The blacksmith shop building and residence existed until 1899, when torn down for other developments. No photographs exist of the Millen shop or home.

Farther up Ann Arbor Street, **John R. Jaynes** purchased land from Cowan and constructed a two-story home and an attached wool storage building. Jaynes figured prominently in the manufacture of woolen goods and spinning in Manchester. The Porter and Jaynes Woolen Mill was located on the south side of Main Street in 1870, east of the river, in the area behind the current Dairy Queen. In the 1880s–1890s, the former Jaynes home and storage building then served as the home of Towne’s Apple Evaporator, a seasonal autumn business apparently sharing the use of the building with wool storage. The production and sale of dried apples was a major business in Manchester, with the product being shipped all over the country. By the 1907–1912 period, the one-story attachment is gone, and the building is simply classified as “miscellaneous storage (old)”. The building was demolished prior to 1941.

Figure 3 shows a photograph of the Jaynes building during the dried apple production period around 1890.

Figure 4 shows the 1872 Birds-Eye View of the corner. The Main Street frontage shows two distinct buildings, comprising the Burtless Building (discussed below), Dr. Conklin’s office, and the Meat Market. The Ann Arbor Street frontage depicts Philo Millen’s home and blacksmith shop, and Jaynes’ multi-story home with the single story wool storage structure.



Figure 3 – The Towne’s Apple Evaporator Building (former Jaynes’ Wool Storage), left side, circa 1890

Life on a Manchester Corner

This historical sign focuses on the corner piece of land bounded by the River Raisin Mill Pond on the west, Main Street on the south, Ann Arbor Street (M-52) on the east, and the former railroad rail bed on the north, now a part of the Manchester Shared-Use Trail. This small parcel of land serves as an example of Manchester’s business development since 1833.

A set of nine buildings once existed on this corner, offering medical services, furniture, farm implements, pianos and organs, meat, blacksmithing, woolen products, coal and all manner of 19th century necessities and luxuries. Changes in products and services needed by Manchester consumers, and the congestion of motorized transportation in the 20th century, began to adversely affect commerce at this intersection. The tight spacing of the buildings between the roads and the Manchester Mill Pond, and the uneven grade of the land, added to these difficulties, prohibiting ground-level expansion of the existing buildings. The corner has declined from its high of nine buildings and several businesses in 1910 to only one building, one business and a developing park today.

Rapid Growth Along Main Street (Exchange Place) – 1870–1900

William Burtless

William Burtless was another entrepreneur with many business and government roles in 19th century Manchester. Burtless was born in Bridgewater Township in September 1842. In May 1873, Burtless moved to Manchester Village and purchased a 50% interest in the Southern Washtenaw Mills, as well as an existing two-story wood frame building built in 1871 by Reynolds and Hewitt as part of the mill operations, west of Conklin’s building and at the edge of the mill pond.

A unique feature of this building’s design was the installation of a skylight, to allow the second floor to serve as a photographic studio, since natural lighting was required for the photographic processes existing at that time. Local photographic studios blossomed in Manchester beginning in 1862, and a downtown location with a skylight was essential. This second floor was occupied by **Samuel Davis** in 1881, when he relocated his studio there. The first floor was initially equipped as a furniture store with a “very nice stock of furniture, consisting of bedroom sets, parlor suites, tables, couches, chairs, and everything usually kept in a first class furniture store.”



Figure 5– View Showing Corner Buildings on Right



Figure 6– View of Three Corner Buildings – Conklin Medical Office, former Burtless and Conklin Buildings

Dr. Conklin Rebuilds, and the Wurster Brothers Come Along

In 1881, Amariah Conklin and his sons replaced their original wood building with the brick “Conklin Block”, and moved into their new offices in July 1881. They occupied the west side of the building, and rented out the corner store to a variety of tenants over the years, including Kirchofer’s Dry Goods, a harness and buggy shop, a meat market, and a general office. The upper level was occupied for 40 years by the structure’s builder, **Warren Kimble**, and his family. Kimble operated a wooden washing machine and stone boat factory in Manchester, across Main Street by the River Raisin.

Development on the corner accelerated during the 1890–1900 period through the investments of **Adam J., Fred G., and George J. Wurster**, brothers who relocated to Manchester from Freedom Township, along with partner **Fred Houck**. They partnered initially in agricultural implements and a variety of related businesses, centered on this northwest corner. These businesses included organs, sewing machines, hardware, carriages and harnesses. In addition, they advertised themselves as gunsmiths, and sold and repaired farm implements.

The year 1899 was a particularly active one for this corner in both property ownership changes and building construction. Ebenezer Conklin, William Burtless, and the Wurster Brothers/Fred Houck all launched a frenzy of new construction and infrastructure improvements which remade the appearance of the corner. The Wurster Brothers first purchased Dr. Conklin’s building in 1899 to expand their business. Ebenezer Conklin then built a new two-story building on the east edge of the Mill Pond for his new office, the first building constructed with “modern” steel framing, electricity, and forced-air heating.

Meanwhile, William Burtless completed a rebuild of his former wood building to match the quality and appearance of his neighbors, and then sold the building to the Wurster Brothers, who fitted it up for the new furniture and undertaking firm of Foster & Wurster Bros. & Co. With the construction of Dr. Conklin’s new office, and the improvements to the Burtless Building, the north side of Main St. east of the mill pond now had the buildings which would remain well into the 20th century. **Figure 5** shows a view looking down Main Street, with the three buildings on the right side. **Figure 6** shows the final configuration about 1905. The left building is Dr. Conklin’s office, and the center building sign reads “Schriber Furn. Co.,” while the awning still reads “Foster, Wurster Bros. and Co,” the previous owner. The building to the right is Fred Houck’s farm implement store.

The two buildings on the right existed until 1939, when they were demolished to construct a grocery store. The left side building was converted to apartments and existed until the 1960s, when they were demolished and a parking lot created for the grocery store.



Figure 7–Wursters and Houcks

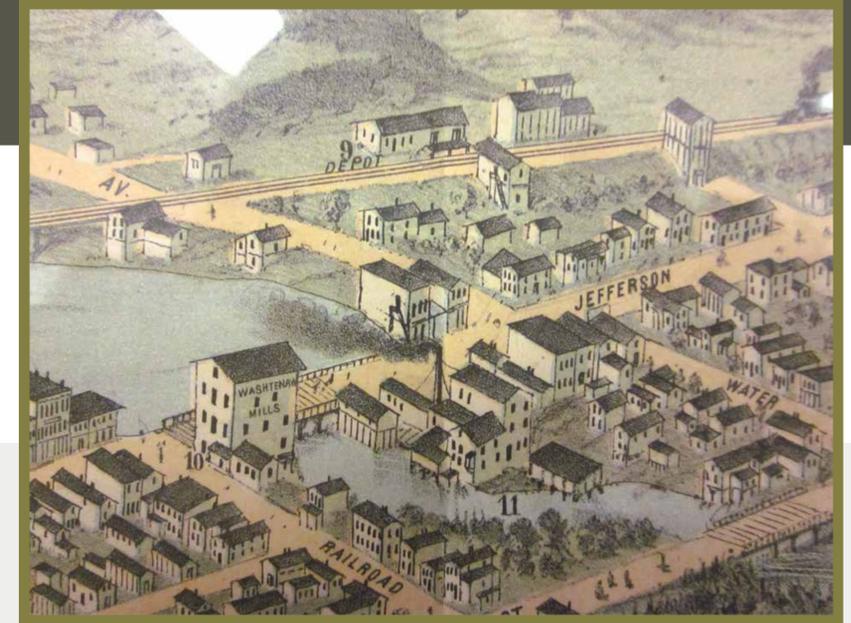


Figure 4 – 1872 Birds-Eye View of the Corner

The Barn and Office Building on Ann Arbor Street

The Wurster Brothers continued their investments, buying all the lots on Ann Arbor Street to the railbed. On August 31, 1899, the *Manchester Enterprise* reported: “The frame for the Wurster Bros & Co.’s barn on Ann Arbor Street is being raised this afternoon.” This is the first reference to the former white barn which existed at 116 Ann Arbor Street, purchased and demolished by the Village of Manchester in 2011. By July 1900 the company was selling coal from this location. In October 1902, Wurster Bros. bought timber from the railroad grain bridge to use in building coal sheds adjacent to the barn. These sheds sat between the barn and the brick corner building.



Figure 8–The Former Buss Barn and Home, 116 Ann Arbor Street

In September 1905, Adam Wurster converted the Jaynes building from the former wool storage site into an office, which eventually became the home attached to the barn, also purchased by the Village in 2011 and demolished. Wurster sold the property to a partnership of **William Schaffer** and **Charles Burtless**, and by 1927 it is listed as Burtless, Henzie Co., with **Philip Henzie** as operator of the coal yard. This company maintained ownership of the business until May 1932, when it was sold to **Oscar Buss**, a 43-year old farmer from Sharon Township and former meat market operator. He ran the business with his wife Ruth.

The Busses dealt in coal, coke, and lumber from 1932 to April 1944, when they sold to **Veryl C. and Millie Schill**. The Schills ran the business as the Schill Coal Co. for a little over four years, selling it in August 1948 to **Frederick “Fritz” Buss and Ellen Buss**. The Buss family owned, operated, and lived in these buildings from August 1948 through June 1979, operating as the Buss Coal Co. This long and recent tenure resulted in the main structure being commonly referred to as the “Buss Barn” (**Figure 8**).

C. F. Smith Grocery/Mingus Market/A&B Grocery

In 1939, the two corner buildings on Main Street were demolished, to make way for a “modern” supermarket. The **C. F. Smith Grocery** chain was founded in Detroit in the 1910s, and used modern economies-of-scale and efficient warehousing methodologies, promoting themselves as low-cost purveyors of “pure foods”. It initially occupied the corner Wurster building, and constructed the current building by 1940. The grocery store remained under the ownership of C. F. Smith Co. until May 1954, when it was purchased by **Mertyn Mingus**. The store was renamed the Mingus Market, and by the early 1960s was known as the **A&B Grocery** and affiliated with the IGA chain of stores. **Figure 9** is a November 1963 view down Main Street of the former Ebenezer Conklin Building (then apartments) and the A&B Grocery. The store operated here until the mid-1970s.



Figure 9–A&B Grocery Store, 1963

The building has held a variety of businesses over the years, and as of October 2016 is being repurposed into a full service restaurant and sports bar, the only building remaining from the corner’s 1907 peak period.

Created: October 2016
Support from 2016 Community Tourism Action Plan
Funded by: Washtenaw County CVB and Village of Manchester DDA
Graphics by Sue Maher, Moxie Grafix LLC

Research and content provided by the Manchester Area Historical Society. Further details on the subject matter contained herein is available through the Manchester Area Historical Society.