

# *Winchester*

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DOWNTOWN  
WALKING TOUR



# Winchester

## DOWNTOWN WINCHESTER

The City of Winchester was created in 1793 from 66 acres of land donated by a frontiersman named John Baker who owned 319 acres. It was a wilderness, a farm of cane-covered hills, and its one advantage was a spring large enough to provide water for 500-600 people. He broke the land into lots, laid out streets, and provided free land to the county for a courthouse, a school, a jail, and a stray animal pen. The town was named in honor of Winchester, Virginia, Baker's former home. By 1797 Winchester consisted of 11 homes connected by a series of paths through the cane. The streets were laid out but not completely cleared, and there were stumps in the middle of Main Street until 1800. By 1800 there were 20 stores, six taverns, 10 churches, six lawyers and one doctor.



In 1812 Winchester was listed as the seventh largest town in Kentucky. It was a thriving town of 412 people and boardwalks were built to permit crossing muddy streets. There was little organized education in the first years, but in 1810 a school was built at the corner of Hickman and Highland and continued at that site until 1974. The Winchester Downtown Commercial District was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982.

Winchester's Main Street is known to locals as the "White Way" because of the five-globed lampposts that were originally gas-burning lights. The name comes from Eastern Kentucky poet and author Jesse Stuart's poem "Up Silver Stairs," in which he expresses his reaction to seeing the lights while

flying over Winchester one night. The lamps were installed in 1912 and were removed in the mid-1950s in favor of brighter lights. In 1983, 10,000 people gathered in Winchester to celebrate the relighting and rebirth of the White Way with two of the original fixtures and many replicas.



Main Street was a dirt pathway until the City Council, in 1910, accepted the plea to cover it with bricks. During the 19th Century, an electric streetcar traveled from Depot Street to Moundale Avenue and was pushed around manually to make its return journey. At the end of the day, the driver would go into a store, call the electric company and have them turn off the power to the streetcar.

Winchester has one of the few elevated sidewalks in the Commonwealth of Kentucky giving this block of Main Street the name “High On Main.”



# Winchester

DOWNTOWN

WALKING TOUR MAP





- 1 Corner of Main & Broadway – Kerr Bldg.
- 2 17 East Broadway
- 3 24 North Main Street
- 4 37 North Main Street – Leeds Theater
- 5 127 North Main Street – Sphar Seed
- 6 5 Cleveland Avenue – McEldowney Building
- 7 34 South Main Street – Clark County Courthouse
- 8 17 Cleveland Avenue – Clark County Judicial Center
- 9 20 Wall Street – The Winchester Sun
- 10 32 Wall Street – City Hall
- 11 22-26 Court Street
- 12 6 Court Street – Fraternity Building
- 13 44 South Main Street – Citizen’s National Bank
- 14 64 South Main Street – Odd Fellows Building
- 15 60 South Main Street
- 16 9 West Lexington Avenue – Engine House Deli
- 17 101 West Lexington Avenue – Central Baptist Church
- 18 108 South Main Street – Brown Proctoria Hotel
- 19 204 South Main Street – First United Methodist Church
- 20 217 South Main Street – Bluegrass Heritage Museum
- 21 215 South Main Street – McEldowney House
- 22 24 East Hickman Street – First Christian Church
- 23 101 South Main Street – Winchester Opera House
- 24 32 East Lexington Avenue – First Baptist Church
- 25 63 South Main Street
- 26 47 South Main Street – Old Clark County National Bank
- 27 41 South Main Street

# Winchester

## POINTS OF INTEREST

1

### Corner of Main & Broadway – Kerr Building

The building was referred to as a “business block.” Smith P. Kerr erected it in 1889 with the intention of housing many commercial businesses. When all of the area could not be rented, the building became the site of the Eclipse Flour Mills. Town Branch, the major source of water for the first settlers of Winchester runs underneath this building. The origin of the rooster perched high above the building is found in the tale of two local businessmen with unwavering political beliefs. In 1932, Franklin D. Roosevelt was running for president against the incumbent Herbert Hoover. Winchester businessman N. Rol Ratliff, a staunch Democrat, made a friendly wager with Ogden Estes, who was a dyed-in-the-wool Republican. They bet on the outcome of the election, each supporting his party. Money being short, the terms were as follows: If Hoover won, Ratliff had to push a peanut up Main Street with his nose. If Roosevelt won, Estes had to stand on top of the Kerr Building, flap his wings and crow. A large crowd gathered to watch Estes pay off his bet. John McLeod, father-in-law of Francis Ratliff and woodworker by hobby, furnished a rooster for the occasion. The wooden fowl was installed and stood atop the building for over fifty years. A few years later the famous rooster disappeared. (Enoch, Harry; A History of the S.P. Kerr Business Block and the Eclipse Mills)



2

### 17 East Broadway

This is the birthplace of Helen Thomas, the recently retired United Press White House correspondent. At the President’s press conferences, Ms. Thomas and the AP White House Chief alternated the honor of asking the first question and closing with a “Thank you, Mr. President.” She was one of nine children of Lebanese immigrants. After working her way through Wayne State University, her first newspaper job was as a copy girl at \$17 a week.

### 3 24 North Main Street

The Pastime Theater, a popular movie place in town, was the site of possibly the worst disaster ever to strike here. March 9, 1918, sixteen people lost their lives, and an untold number of others were seriously injured when an extension to the theater collapsed. The prelude to the disaster began when fire gutted the building next door leaving the high, unsupported masonry wall standing next to the theater. That afternoon, violent winds and heavy rains caused the wall to wobble and collapse.

### 4 37 North Main Street – Leeds Theater

Built in 1925, Leeds Theater was one of three movie theaters in town and continued to operate until 1986. It was one of the first buildings in Winchester to have air conditioning. The theater received its name as the result of a contest during its first renovation in the 1940s. The contest winner rearranged the letters of the name of the theater manager, S. D. Lee, to create “Leeds” Theater. By the late 1980s the theater was in disrepair and was purchased in 1990 by the Winchester Council for the Arts. The building was renovated and now seats 413 as a performing arts center.



### 5 127 North Main Street – Sphar & Company

This building served as a backdrop to two movies: *The Flimflam Man* starring George C. Scott and *Black Beauty*. On the south side of this site, one can get a feel for the bricked roads of the early 1900s. With the introduction of the C & O Railroad, growth and importance came to Winchester.

Retracing your path up North Main to Cleveland Avenue:

### 6 5 Cleveland Avenue – McEldowney Building

This is Winchester’s tallest building and was built for one of Winchester’s prominent citizens, M. T. McEldowney in the early 1900s. It was the first building in town to have a reinforced concrete frame and an elevator. The surface of the building is detailed in the Beaux-Arts classical manner inspired by Italian Renaissance palaces. It housed barber shops, real estate offices, insurance agencies, dental and law offices, and other professional businesses including the U.S. Forest Service.

### 7 34 South Main Street – Clark County Courthouse

The original courthouse was a two-story, four-room log cabin built in 1794 at the cost of \$16. Previous courthouses stood on this spot and were constructed in 1797 and 1822 with the present building constructed in 1853.

It is said that Henry Clay made his debut as an attorney at the Clark County Courthouse as well as his final appearance in court.

The Courthouse clock was installed in 1907. The caretaker had to climb into the loft once a week to scare off pigeons

roosting on the wooden minute hand. The weight of these pigeons caused the clock to be 15 minutes late. This problem was eventually solved when an electric device was installed to “wind” the clock.

The back lawn is the home of sculptor E.M. Vesquesney’s famous World War I statue. The Doughboy faces to the north and has a plaque on the north side listing the names of Clark Countians “who gave their lives in defense of humanity in the World War.”

The Courthouse was placed on the National Register of Historic places in 1974.



## 8 17 Cleveland Avenue – Clark Judicial Center

Hailed as one of the city’s most beautiful buildings, it was completed in 1913. It is an example of Parisian Beaux-Art and is constructed of brick with a marble neoclassical facade. The building served as a U.S. Post Office for 78 years before becoming the James Clark Judicial Center in 1990.

## 9 20 Wall Street – The Winchester Sun

This large commercial structure, “one of the best business houses in the city,” was originally leased to Parrish & Bradless, who ran a wholesale grocery and hardware business in the early 1900s.

It was constructed in 1908 on a site formerly occupied by a jail, jailer’s residence and a place to hold slaves during the slave trade. *The Winchester Sun* is the oldest business in town, being over 100 years old. The first published newspaper was known as “The Smooth Coon” in 1878.





10

**32 Wall Street – City Hall**

City Hall was constructed in 1912. The building has a combination architectural design, complete with tower and round-arched openings. The city's police and fire departments were housed in this structure until the late 1970s. Following a recent renovation, the first and second floors house a number of city offices. In the early 1990s the bell was removed from the bell tower and placed on ground level in front of the building.

11

**22-26 Court Street**

The east side of the commercial block was constructed prior to 1886, and a matching west side was built just before 1895. The west building has rock-faced stone lintels and sills, while those on the east half are smooth. The east section was a tailor's shop and the west section was the office of the *Winchester Sun* in 1901. The west section was known as the "Police Court."

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**6 Court Street – Fraternity Building**

This handsome four-story structure, built as the Masonic Lodge, was called the Fraternity Building because it was used by most of the sororities and fraternities of Kentucky Wesleyan College. The Edgington Funeral Home occupied the first floor until 1948. The building itself is brick Classical Revival with a fine terra cotta decoration.

13

**44 South Main Street – Citizen's National Bank**

Built between 1886 and 1889, this building is one of the most impressive historic commercial buildings in Winchester. Rusticated stonework, carved medallion faces, decorated gables and elegant ironwork are featured in this majestic building.



The medallion faces seen on the arch over the entrance are of Lizzie Winn and Mary Miller, daughters of Dr. Washington Miller and Col. R.N. Winn, founders of the Citizen's National Bank. This building replaced an earlier bank building that was constructed soon after a disastrous fire of 1855, which destroyed this block of Main Street. The third floor and extending turret were removed in the early 1990's due to extensive water damage.

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**64 South Main Street – Odd Fellows Building**

This building is easily the most distinguishable building in the downtown area. Designed and built at the end of the 19th century, it has an elegant and well-executed design; featured above the second floor windows is a unique motif including a book with initials, an eye with radiating rays and an hour glass.

## 15 60 South Main Street

As you look above the second-floor windows, you will notice the intriguing feature of a fine early canopy supported by long chains. The end blocks of the canopy have pineapple finials and ball pendants. It was built around 1890 and later served as a billiard parlor followed by the Winchester Candy Company.



## 16 9 West Lexington Avenue – Engine House Deli ▼

On March 17, 1885, W. A. Atersal, then Fire Chief, and his wife deeded the Board of Councilmen of Winchester a parcel of land situated on Fairfax Street for the purpose of erecting an Engine House. It was completed in 1886 and occupied until 1909 when a fire in an adjacent building forced a move to temporary quarters behind the court house until the completion of City Hall in 1913. The Department was first known as the “Rough and Ready” Fire Department and received one of the first Webb Hose fire trucks in the state. Before the department existed, city dwellers protected themselves against fires with buckets, later known as “bucket brigades”. The number of fire buckets was regulated by the number of fireplaces found in each house. Various restaurants and offices have occupied the engine house until March 17, 1984 when the Engine House Deli first opened its doors. *(Courtesy of the Engine House Deli)*

## 17 101 West Lexington Avenue – Central Baptist Church

Covering nearly an entire city block, Central Baptist Church has become a well-known landmark throughout Winchester. Organized on October 27, 1910, groundbreaking on the original sanctuary of the church took place on May 11, 1911 and was completed and dedicated in November 1912 for a total cost of \$40,000. What began with only seventy-six people in 1910 has grown to over 1,550 resident members. The new sanctuary of Central Baptist Church was completed in 1990 and remains the current sanctuary for the congregation.

## 18 108 South Main Street – Brown Proctoria Hotel

This splendid hotel building, once the pride of Winchester, is the lineal descendant of hotels that have occupied the same site for 112 years. In 1804 Mr. Flanagan built a log rooming house, which was the first “tavern” in the town and became known as the Flanagan House. On July 4, 1805, there was a notable gathering at the tavern to hear Henry Clay speak from the stump of a large bur oak tree. Around 1824, the Flanagan House was replaced by a brick structure that was thought to be one of the first brick hotels in the state until its demolition in 1904 to make room for the present day Brown Proctoria. The brick hotel, originally known as the Old National House, was later renamed the Reese House after Major W.E. Reese purchased the land. The lower portion of the building adjacent to the Brown Proctoria on Lexington Avenue is believed to be part of the original structure of the Reese House that was used as hotel rooms in the 1890’s. Two Presidents, Andrew Jackson and Jefferson Davis, are known to have stayed here. The Brown Proctor, as it is commonly referred to, was the most preferred hotel in town in the early 1900’s as it was the farthest from the railroad. The walls are surfaced with Indiana limestone on the first floor and granite brick on the upper floors. It now serves as an apartment complex.



## 19 204 South Main Street – First United Methodist Church

Built in 1923 the church was modeled after the Winchester Cathedral in England. The outer shell is made of sawed Bedford limestone. The art glass windows were made, cut and fitted in Venice, Italy. The organ was built by M.P. Moller of Hagerstown, Maryland and has 1,239 pipes.

## 20 217 South Main Street – Bluegrass Heritage Museum

In 1887, upon returning from Berlin, Germany, Dr. John W. Ishmael built this magnificent structure as his home after opening his medical practice on West Lexington Avenue in downtown Winchester. In 1927, Dr. Edward P. Guerrant bought the land and established the Guerrant Clinic. The clinic provided medical service and hospital facilities for the mountain people of Eastern Kentucky. The clinic was described as one of the four best small hospitals in the Southeastern

## Winchester 1920's



United States. The Clinic serviced this area for about 60 years. Many mountain people were uncomfortable about going to Lexington for treatment and many could not afford the cost. So people traveled to the Guerrant Clinic by mule, stretcher, buckboard, and the Lexington & Eastern Railroad. Directly behind the clinic, a house was built to provide living quarters for the clinic's nurses.



### 21 215 South Main Street – McEldowney House

M.T. McEldowney was a prominent businessman in Winchester in the early 1900s. He was a banker and partner in the milling business with Matlack and Woolcot, but he also built and owned a number of downtown buildings, including the McEldowney Building. His wife was the first woman in the city to own an electric car. The House, while now in disrepair, was once a grand showpiece on Main Street.

### 22 24 East Hickman Street – First Christian Church

Originally known as Strode's Fork Church, First Christian Church has found its roots rich in history since being established in 1791. After being established, the church became known as Friendship Church and was located in the Northwest corner of the Winchester Cemetery. A few of the grave stones from the church are still visible on the cemetery grounds. It wasn't until Friendship Church withdrew from the Boone's Creek Association that the church adopted the name of First Christian Church of Winchester. This towering structure that overlooks downtown Winchester was constructed in 1909 and remains the present home of the historic

congregation. One of the defining features of the church is its twelve stained glass windows depicting the life of Christ found in the Gospels.

## 23 101 South Main Street – Winchester Opera House

Also known as Simpson's Music Hall, this large brick structure was built for James D. Simpson, the first mayor of Winchester. Originally, the stage was set against the rear east wall, and the entrance was on East Lexington Ave. The Main Street side of the building was occupied by storefronts and in 1901 was the location of the Post Office. Housed there also has been a confectioner, a pool room and Dinty Moore Restaurant.



## 24 32 East Lexington Avenue – First Baptist Church

A revival held at the Presbyterian Church on Main Street in the 1850's sparked the interest of some of those present to begin a new congregation in downtown Winchester. Organized on June 8, 1859, members of the newly formed First Baptist Church purchased a lot on East Lexington Avenue from Dr. John M. Riffe for \$700. In 1861 a modest frame structure was dedicated until the completion of the present facility in 1888. Over the years the buildings have been renovated, but the church remains active at its original location.



## 25 63 South Main Street

This broad, impressive commercial structure was built for Dr. Washington Miller, president of the Citizen's National Bank. It was the home of Arctic, Turnbull and Co, a dry goods store with offices on the second floor. The upper part of the facade is divided into three sections. The central section has a tall window with an "1880" date plaque set on a raised diamond pattern under the segmental arch.

26

## 47 South Main Street – Old Clark County National Bank

This is the only remaining iron-front building in Winchester. It was completed in 1880, and the upper floors were rented as offices. It was once noted in the local newspaper as “the finest bank building in the state outside of Louisville...”

27

## 41 South Main Street

The Bloomfield Department Store was a Winchester institution from 1885 to the late 1980s. The segmental gable is covered with low-relief swags. The two protruding bay windows are also decorated with swags. If you let your eyes wander above the bay windows you will find a likeness of Vic Bloomfield, founder of the department store.



## FASCINATING HISTORICAL FACTS:

- Joel T. Hart, the world-renowned sculptor, was born here in 1810.
- Forrest Boone, who made the “chant of the tobacco auctioneer” famous on radio in the 1930s and 1940s, was born and reared here.
- Craig Wood, the golfer, first taught golf at the Winchester Country Club before going on to win the Masters and the U.S. Open.
- Fred Toney, who pitched an historic 11-inning, no-hit game for Cincinnati in 1907, first played ball on a Winchester team in the Blue Grass League.
- Eskippakithiki, last Shawnee Indian town in the state, was located in Clark County. The area Indian Old Fields still turns up an occasional arrowhead.
- Pilot Knob, where in June 1769 Boone got his first view of the Blue Grass, is located on the Clark-Powell County line.
- Governor James Clark, 12th Governor of Kentucky, lived and is buried in Winchester.
- Claude Sullivan, Kentucky’s outstanding sportscaster 1959 - 1964 by a vote of the National Association of Sportscaster and Sportswriters, was a Winchester native.
- William H. Wallace, the man who prosecuted the Jesse James gang, was born in Clark County in 1848.
- Allen Tate, nationally known poet, author and literary critic, was born here in 1899.
- Harold G. Epperson, Congressional Medal of Honor recipient, is buried in Winchester.



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