

HOW SHOPPING SHAPED COOKEVILLE

By GLENN JONES and CAROL BRADFORD

In early towns, the grocery, dry goods, and hardware stores were located in buildings that surrounded their town squares.

In Cookeville in 1854 when the town lots were laid out, business men bought lots and built their stores. Most were within a block or two of the courthouse.

In 1890, when the Nashville and Knoxville Railroad laid tracks, the tracks bypassed the center of Cookeville where the courthouse square was.

The depot was built where it is today; and with all the activities that came with the train, businesses sprang up all around the depot. In 1915 the federal government built the large federal Courthouse building, which housed the Cookeville Post Office in between the two major business districts.

Broad Street, which connected the depot with the Square, saw a lot of major changes during this time.

That area was lined with large houses and, little by little, the houses were torn down, and now all businesses line that stretch of Broad Street.

The block between Cedar and Walnut avenues on Broad Street saw large, adjoining brick buildings on both sides of the street.

This area was known as the West Side Shopping Center; it was boasted as the largest shopping center in the Upper Cumberland.

You could buy anything in that area: automobiles, radios, clothes, furniture and groceries; you could eat at several cafes, watch movies at several theaters, and spend the night at several hotels.

You could play pool, bowl, or have your picture taken at several photograph studios. In the 1960s, several shopping centers sprang up all around town. In 1964 the Big M Center on Washington Avenue opened.

It had several stores and a restaurant. Today it is known as the Premier Medical Center.

Two years later Bargain Town Shopping Center opened in 1966 on South Jefferson, next door to the entrance to the Putnam County Fairgrounds.

The Railroad Salvage Furniture and Appliance Store was the main business when the center opened. The Tastee Freeze ice cream restaurant was located in the parking lot.

This shopping center is still active today.

That same year Mid-Town Shopping Center opened. This shopping center had a major impact on the West Side Shopping Center.

Big K department store opened its doors in a large building, next door was Sears catalog department, and on the end was Krogers grocery store. This new way of shopping brought people from all the surrounding counties to shop in Cookeville.

In the years to come Mid-Town Shopping Center saw many changes. The Sears store moved to a new location on Willow, and Hobby World took over that spot.

In 1972, Kroger moved to a new shopping center, and Big K took over where Kroger was and called it the Big K annex.

At this time the Walmart was starting to grow; it bought out Big K and changed the store to Walmart; this was the first location for Walmart in Cookeville.

Walmart eventually built its own new building where Tractor Supply is now. Heilig Myers Furniture Store moved in to the old Big K building.

After several years they closed and Cotton Eyed Joe Western Dance Club was in the building for 10 years. The whole shopping center was sold to the city and torn down to expand Dogwood Park.

Back in 1966, when Big K came to town, other shopping centers opened. One of them was the Village Center on 10th Street near the entrance to Park Village. Food Town Grocery Store, Village Square Men's Shop and the Citizens Bank branch office opened there. The next year, 1967, North Side Shopping Center opened on the corner of 10th and Washington.

The Cooper-Martin Grocery Store and the Super D Drug Store opened at that location.

Four years later another major shopping center was constructed in Cookeville on Willow Avenue between Spring and Stevens streets. This new center was named Willow Tree Shopping Center.

Rose's Department Store opened there in 1971, along with a grocery store, Eckerd's Drug Store, and several other stores.

Today it is still a vibrant shopping center. The next year, 1972, saw another major shopping center development in Cookeville.

A street was closed, and a large house was torn down to make way for Grant City Shopping Center, located two blocks off the Square on South Jefferson.

Grant Department Store, Super X Drug Store, Kroger and Radio Shack opened their doors here. Two banks were built in the parking lot. Later Grant went out of business, and K-Mart came to Cookeville and located its first store here. Today that building houses Hobby Lobby when K-Mart moved to their present location.

Kroger and Super X Drugs moved south down Jefferson to their present location. Radio Shack moved next door to the stockyards.

Then Radio Shack left Cookeville. Dollar General Market is there today in the old Kroger location. This shopping center continues to do well.

In 1977 the Cookeville Mall opened with the JC Penney and Harvey's Department stores as the main anchors, with several smaller stores in the mall.

JC Penney continues to operate at that location. In later years Cookeville saw a great expansion on W. Jackson Street and Willow Avenue with the opening of Jackson Plaza.

With Putnam County's strong economy and location, developers continue to look at Cookeville for building new shopping experiences for its residents and for people from all the surrounding counties. There are several national chain stores looking to locate in Cookeville; the future looks good to keep Cookeville as a major shopping center in the Upper Cumberland.

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*Read more at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>