MONTEVALLO

Main Street

Memories

W.C. WEEMS AND NEIGHBORS ON MIDDLE STREET

by Clay Nordan
Montevallo Historical Society

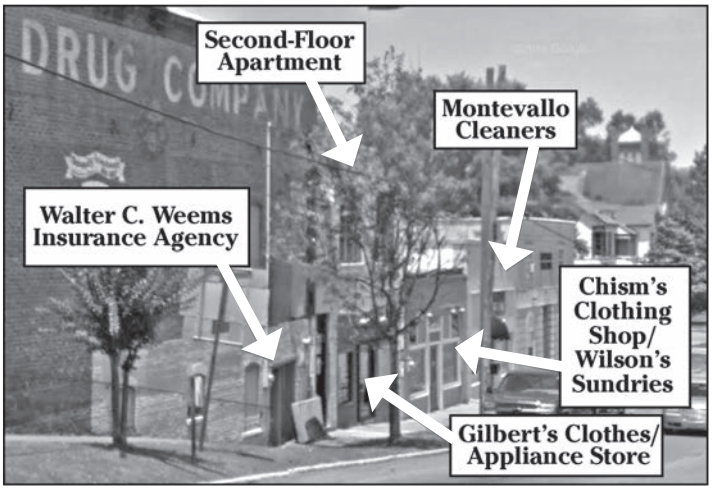
We now turn north on Middle Street from Main Street and feature a group of small stores clustered together in a short stretch behind the old Wilson's Drug Co. building. It's an odd conglomeration of spaces that has attracted an interesting selection of businesses over the years and even includes a second story apartment. As usual, our focus will be on businesses located here in the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.

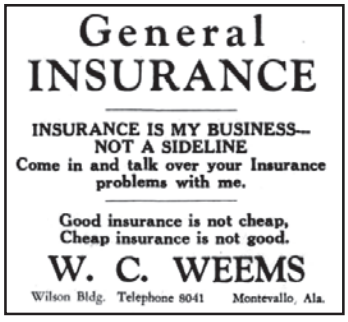
The first business is the Walter C. Weems Insurance Agency, which moved into a dungeon-like space in the basement of the Wilson's/McClure Drugs building in 1949. It had previously been located in the Masonic building on Main Street. The door to Mr. Weems' office was the left-hand entrance to the drug store basement. The right-hand door led into a full basement that the drug store used for storage. W.C. Weems was in the insurance business in Montevallo for many years and seemed to have plenty of customers in spite of his claustrophobic working conditions and less-than-welcoming office entrance.

The building next door to Mr. Weems would not have been that distinctive if not for a residential apartment on the second floor that a single lady rented for many years. Due to employment opportunities at Alabama College, It was not unusual in the mid-20th century for faculty and staff to rent rooms or apartments in buildings and houses located near the campus. This downtown apartment was an exception, but no one seemed to notice it very much given the transient nature of so many Montevallo residents and people connected to the college.

The retail space below the apartment was home to several stores and businesses over the years, among them were Gilbert's Ready-To-Wear clothing store in the 1930's and '40's followed by Bashore's appliance store.

Two doors down was the location of Montevallo Cleaners, owned and operated by Clarence Chism. In 1946, Mr. Chism opened Chism's Ready-to-Wear in the store between the cleaners and the building with the upstairs apartment (in his early days in Montevallo as a businessman, Mr. Chism and his young family rented and lived in the upstairs apartment). Mr. Chism sold Montevallo Cleaners to Earl McGaughy in 1949 and soon moved his clothing store to Main Street just a couple of years before Bloomer Wilson opened Wilson's Sundries in the former clothing store on Middle Street. Mr. Chism closed his clothing store around 1955/56 when he took over DeLuxe Cleaners on Main Street next door to the city hall. That same year, Mr. McGaughy moved his cleaning business into a new building a few doors north on Middle Street at the corner of Middle and Valley. When male students started enrolling at Alabama College, it was not long before the former Cleaners storefront was converted to a coin operated Laundromat, which became a boon to these young men when they suddenly needed clean underwear.





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MONTEVALLO MAIN STREET MEMORIES is adapted from the series, THROWBACK THURSDAY, a **Montevallo Historical Society** and **Montevallo Main Street** partnership started in 2018. Each installment revisits commercial and residential life on Main Street and in the downtown area in the early to mid-twentieth century. The series remains available online and may be viewed at **www.historicmontevallo.org** under "Local History".