

Introduction

Welcome to Historic Downtown Ada! As you follow this guide, you will learn about life in Ada around the dawn of the 20th Century.

The Reed and Daggs families moved to this area in 1890. The Ada Post Office was established in 1892. In 1893, the present City of Ada was named for Ada Reed, the oldest daughter of Postmaster W.J. “Jeff” Reed. Mr. Reed is considered the founder of the town, since he petitioned the Federal Post Office Department to establish a post office in his store.

Before 1900, there were several general stores, a blacksmith, a cotton gin, and even a photographer. The business district was moved across the creek in 1900 to be near the newly built railroad. The City of Ada became incorporated in 1901. The location of the original townsite and sites of these early places are shown in the **Early Townsite Map**.

The Walking Tour

This is the written key to the **Walking Tour Map**. Numbers correspond to those found on this map.

1. Railroad Depot

You are in front of the Frisco Passenger Depot. Three railroads – the “Frisco,” the “Santa Fe,” and the “Oklahoma City, Ada & Atoka” – once provided service to Ada. On New Year’s Eve, each railroad had an engine parked at its station; at midnight, all three engines blew their whistles and rang their bells to welcome the New Year.

The large concrete basin at the west end of the parking lot is the remains of one of four drinking fountains that were donated to the City of Ada in 1910 by the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. An old photograph shows a fountain with three levels – one for people, one for horses, and another one near the ground for smaller animals. The fountains were in the intersections of Main & Rennie, Main & Townsend, Main & Oak, and 12th and Broadway.

The southwest corner of Main & Stockton was the site of the Texas Wagon Yard, a popular place to keep your horse and wagon while you shopped. Bunks and a camp kitchen were available for out-of-towners. The yard was destroyed by fire in 1904.

2. Federal Courthouse/Opera House

The Federal Courthouse/Opera House was built in 1903. The courtroom and Grayson Drugs were on street level. An opera house and meeting room occupied the 2nd floor. Later, the Ada Hotel occupied the 2nd floor. This whole block was known as the “Bucket of Blood” because of the knife and gun fights that took place here. Ada was still Indian Territory and the judicial system was notorious for allowing criminals to get away with little or no punishment.

Finally, four men who allegedly murdered a prominent local rancher were lynched by a group of Ada businessmen in 1909. The lynching received nationwide attention and helped bring law and order to the area. A granite marker describing this event is located ½ block north of this intersection.

3. McSwain Theater

The McSwain Theater was built in 1920. Tickets cost 15 cents for adults and a dime for children. The Spanish mission style building could hold 1,350 people. Foster McSwain is said to have introduced to Ada the idea of drawing for cash door prizes. The first “talkie” film shown in Ada was at the McSwain.

At one time, there were four other theaters here – the Kiva, the Strand, the Ritz, and the Ada Theater. Gene Autry even made a personal appearance in Ada to promote one of his movies.

4. Post Office

The Post Office was moved from “Old Town” in 1902. The story goes that the building was moved in the middle of the night with the postmaster locked inside because he had opposed the relocation. The Post Office moved again to West 12th Street in 1910 and to its present site on East 12th Street in 1933.

The first City of Ada well was dug by John Beard at the back of this lot. A City ordinance passed in 1902 required each business to have a barrel of water in front of the building for fighting fires. This ordinance saved much of the business district a year later when several wooden buildings burned.

5. Ada National Bank

The Ada National Bank opened in 1900. Cotton was the primary cash crop at the time and the 2nd story of the building housed the offices of cotton brokers. Wagons of baled cotton lined up for blocks in all directions during fall harvest. Brokers literally jumped from wagon to wagon, bargaining with farmers about a fair price for their crops.

The Leader Shoe Store occupied this corner after the bank closed; the outside east wall was covered with a sign listing area citizens who were serving in the armed forces.

6. Round Bale Cotton Gin

An important part of the cotton industry was the Round Bale Cotton Gin, located here. In 1903, 20,000 bales of cotton were processed here. At one point, Ada had several cotton gins, a cotton compress, and a cotton seed oil company. The boll weevil and soil depletion put an end to the “cotton era” in the early 1920’s.

7. The Ada News

The Ada News is the only newspaper that has been in continuous operation in the community since the early 20th Century. It has occupied this spot since 1904. The round “window” above the 2nd floor windows was used by reporters to announce election results to crowds waiting in the street below.

8. Merchants & Planters Bank

The Merchants & Planters bank was established in 1902. Pharmacist Joe Bryan later opened his Corner Drug Store in this building. Corner drug stores were popular hangouts for young people in the early 1900's. Many drug stores had carhops during the 1930's but that practice ended when young men were called to serve in World War II.

9. 25,000 Club

The 25,000 Club, an organization made up of visionary businessmen, met in lavishly furnished quarters on the 2nd story of this building. The group's purpose was economic development. Their goal was to become a city with a population of 25,000.

10. Evans Hardware

The Evans Building was constructed in 1903 and was the location of Greer-Cox Clothiers and Evans Hardware until the 1980's. Notice the date at the top of the building.

11. Shaw's Department and Nickel Store

Shaw's Department and Nickel Store was built in 1914 and has lovely molded signatures on its front. The building was remodeled in recent years and it became evident that this building was constructed later than the one next door; painted ads were discovered on what would be the exterior wall of the adjoining building.

12. Pontotoc Building

The Pontotoc Building has been the location of several businesses, including M. Levin Furniture, Gluckman's Department Store, and Thompson Book & Supply. It was built in 1918 by P.A. Norris and features "continuous concrete poured walls," an experimental technique developed by Portland Cement.

13. Thompson Book Store

The Thompson College Shop, a book store and soda fountain owned by Charles and James Thompson, opened for business at 930 E. Main in 1926. This second store was opened at 200 E. Main in 1930. The Thompson Book Store is still in operation in Ada today and is still owned by members of the Thompson family.

14. Blake Coca-Cola Bottling Company

The Coca-Cola Bottling Works was established on this corner in 1910. The franchise was purchased by T.B. Blake in 1912 and the plant was moved to 300 N. Rennie in 1928.

To the east, most of the land between the railroad tracks and the college was cotton fields when the large Administration building at the end of Main Street was built in 1910. It was the first building of the new East Central Normal School and cost \$100,000 to construct.

15. Duncan Building/Pioneer Telephone

The Pioneer Telephone Company office was on the 2nd floor of the W.C. Duncan Building, erected in 1917. The 1st floor is believed to have been a dance hall/game room at one time.

The owners of the Curiosity Shop, which now occupies this building, have carefully restored and furnished the building with antique display cabinets to resemble its original appearance. The building has had just four owners since its construction.

16. Harris Hotel

What is now Juliana Park was the site of the Harris Hotel, built in 1903. The original building had only two stories; it is not certain when the upper story was added. The Harris Hotel was known far and wide for its excellent service and cuisine.

The Harris Hotel was purchased in the 1930's and renamed the "Juliana" in honor of its new owner, Julia Mae Smith. Mrs. Smith and her husband had struck oil near Fittstown, Oklahoma, and did much to develop the Ada business community.

17. Montgomery Ward

Julia Mae Smith built the Montgomery Ward store on this location in the 1930's. It was converted into the Ada Public Library in 1984. Headquarters for the Pontotoc County Literacy Coalition and the McKeel Research Library are found on the 2nd floor today.

18. Barringer Grocery

Barringer Grocery was also built by Julia Mae Smith in the 1930's for her brothers, John and Fred Barringer. Many Adans remember this as the original location of "Dutch's Market."

19. Ada Public Library

Now widely known as the Ada Arts & Heritage Center, this Ada Public Library was designed by local architect Albert Ross and built in 1936. The building was renovated and furnished with period furniture in 1984, when the library moved to its present location (see #17 above). It now serves as home to many of the community's cultural activities including concerts, art exhibits, and weddings.

You are on 14th Street, which from Rennie west to Broadway was once known as "Church Row." St. Luke's Episcopal Church was situated in the middle of the block on the south side of the street; the Presbyterian Church stood on the northeast corner of 14th and Broadway.

One block south, on 15th Street, was the location of the first school in "New Town," owned by Miss Villa Wilson. The First Methodist Church held services for some time in Miss Wilson's school. Members of the First Christian Church and the First Baptist Church met in the Harris Hotel on alternate Sundays in 1901-02 (see #16 above). The Baptist, Methodist, and First Christian churches have remained in this vicinity.

20. Sugg Clinic

The Sugg Clinic, with a staff of 14 doctors including many specialists, offered comprehensive medical care during the 1950's. In fact, it was known by some as the "Little Mayo Clinic." This building is a fine example of art-deco architecture, and was reportedly among the first in the nation to be air-conditioned.

Dr. Sugg's first office was a small building just east of this structure. His offices were on the first floor and his family lived upstairs.

Directly across the street to the west is the Pontotoc County Courthouse. It was constructed in 1926 at a cost of \$200,000.

21. Memorial Convention Hall

The Memorial Convention Hall originally stood on the site of the present Ada City Hall. The impressive two-story building cost \$100,000 to erect.

Will Rogers, several Oklahoma governors, and other dignitaries performed or lectured here. The building also housed the Ada Youth Center, the American Legion, the Boy Scouts, the Red Cross, the Chamber of Commerce, and the National Guard.

22. The Colonnade

The block between Townsend and Broadway on 12th Street became the business hub during the first decade of the 1900's. Among the stops located here were the Post Office, Home Title Abstract, Bidly Printing Company, and the R.B. Evans Candy Company. A hotel known as the Colonnade stood in the middle of the block. Many people expected 12th Street to be the Main Street of Ada. In 1909, it was the first to be paved.

23. Central Fire Station/City Hall

The Central Fire Station was built around 1908. The original building served as Ada City Hall and housed office space, the library, and an auditorium on its 2nd floor. The Ada Fire Department was housed at street level. In 1909, the City had two paid firemen. The day fireman drew \$50 a month, while the night firemen was only paid \$25. This building was remodeled in 1939.

24. Aldridge Hotel

The Aldridge Hotel was constructed around 1927 at a cost of \$300,000. Oilmen and celebrities used to gather at the Aldridge and it could be assumed many significant business deals were struck in the coffee shop. Some of the movie "Tulsa," starring Susan Hayward and Robert Preston, was filmed in the Ada area and the cast stayed at the Aldridge Hotel while they were here.

25. Criswell Funeral Home

J.U. Criswell built this funeral home in 1925. This business has been in the same family for generations. Notice the stained glass window on the east side of the building – that's part of the original chapel.

26. American Building

The American Building, also known as the Fleet Building, was built by W.B. Skirvin in 1925. Skirvin was with American Oil & Refining Company and planned to live in a penthouse on the top story. There was supposed to be a two-car garage on the 2nd story.

Skirvin sold this building to the Fleet family in 1929 and moved to Oklahoma City. The American Building, the new County Courthouse, and the six-story Aldridge Hotel gave Ada a bold new skyline as the City celebrated its first quarter century of growth.

27. Masonic Lodge

This location occupies an important place in Ada's history, as it probably served as the site for planning the 1909 hanging (see #2 above). The Masons were politically active during this time and it is believed that many of them had a part in the event. All the participants made a pact to keep the proceedings secret. The pact was kept and no one knows for certain to this day the identity of those involved.

28. Railway Express

The American Railway Express Building was originally owned by E.B. McCauley, a very successful insurance agent and realtor. A notorious robbery occurred in 1940, when \$5,000 was stolen from the Express office. The culprits were never apprehended and rumors of an "inside job" were never proven.

29. First National Bank

The First National Bank – now known as Vision Bank – has been in the same location since 1902. The original building had a turret on the corner. The bank actually opened for business in the Alfred Nettles Hardware Store down the street while the original building was being finished.

Two doors to the east was the "Palm Garden," a popular teen center in the 1920's.

30. Rollow Building

I. Harris Clothiers, and later S & Q Clothiers, occupied the corner section of the Rollow Building. Mr. Rollow had a mercantile that took up much of the rest of this block for many years.

This is one of the few buildings in historic Ada where the original bricks may be seen – look on the back of the building.

31. Simpson's Surprise Store

Simpson's Surprise Store was owned by R.W. Simpson until it was bought by Sidney and Ben Katz in 1926. The Katz family operated a department store here until the 1980's.

Dr. W.D. Faust had an eight-bed hospital on the 2nd story of the Surprise Store building.

32. Carpenter's Drugs

Carpenter's Drugs was built by Ada co-founder Jeff Reed in 1902. One historian tells that it was actually a grocery store during prohibition and liquor could be bought for "medicinal purposes" if prescribed by a doctor. The grocer kept liquor locked in a cupboard and reportedly followed the letter of the law in dispensing spirits.

33. Citizens National Bank/Oklahoma State Bank

The Oklahoma State Bank was organized in 1903 as the Citizens National Bank. The CNB became the OSB in 1908 and remained on this corner until 1965. The old vault is still in tact and might be viewed upon permission from the current occupant.

34. Haynes Hardware

Haynes Hardware was a popular shopping stop in the early 20th Century and was located to the immediately west of the Oklahoma State Bank.

35. Reed-Harrison Mercantile

Reed-Harrison Mercantile was located just west of Haynes Hardware. The daughters of Jeff Reed – including Ada! – claimed they never really knew where their dad’s store was located on Main Street because it was in that part of town known as the “Bucket of Blood” where women and children weren’t allowed to go (see #2 above).

36. Brown Hotel

At the turn of the 20th Century, the Brown Hotel was located at the corner of Main & Stockton. Traveling businessmen found this hotel convenient when they came to town on the train. The original tin ceiling is visible if you look in the window of the storefront.