

# The History of the Livingston Drug Company

by Gary B. Davis 12.5.2023

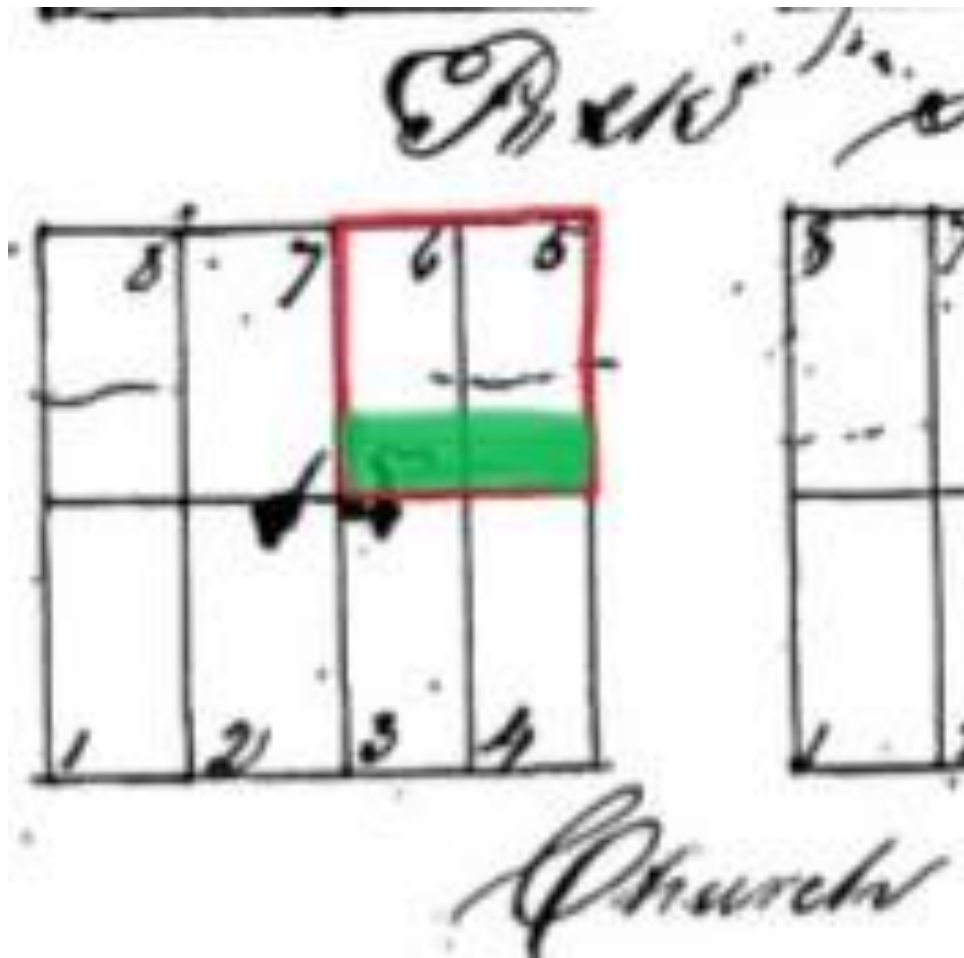
Downtown Livingston has seen many changes through the years. From the crudely built wooden structures that went up in flames on August 28, 1902, numerous brick buildings were built in their place and have stood for over one hundred years.

The building located at 413 N. Washington, known as the Livingston Drug Company Building, is one of these. At the time of this writing, 2023, the building is owned by Joe and Andi Gulley and their business is known as Ruby Cattle Company. The building underwent an incredible restoration in recent years and they are now in business to provide the citizens of Livingston with a wonderful selection of Polk County grass-fed beef, locally sourced goods, wine, and gift items.

Originally built in 1914, it was the tenth brick building that was constructed after the devastating 1902 fire which wiped out three complete blocks of the business district of Livingston.

The title to this property, and all properties in and around Livingston, began with a land grant from Mexico to Moses L. Choate. This grant to the Choate league (4428 acres) was signed in Nacogdoches, Texas on February 7, 1835. Choate donated one hundred acres, on which the town of Livingston is situated, in 1846, to the County for a Site of Justice (County Seat). The town lots were later auctioned off to a variety of parties.

The subject property, lots 5 and 6 of Block 15, was sold by deed dated September 1, 1847, from the Polk County Commissioners to John English, a brother-in-law of Moses Choate. These two lots, along with six others in Block 2, sold for the sum of \$71.00. Each lot was 53.5 feet by 107 feet.



The Drug Store lot in green

After being sold on May 8, 1849, to Whitehead VanDam, they were next sold back to Choate, on December 1, 1949. There is no record of what may have been built on the lots and in August 4, 1885, the lots were sold in a tax sale. Lot 5, which fronts on Washington Avenue, for \$5.25 and lot 6, which lies west of lot 5, sold for \$4.88. They were sold by

T.J. Epperson, Polk County Tax Collector to J.M. Crosson.

The Choate heirs appeared in the chain of title in a deed dated December 28, 1896 to A.B. Green. The heirs that signed the deed were Bettie Choate Robbins, a daughter; Zelda Choate, a daughter who was married to a cousin J.M. Choate; and Jimmie Oliphant Stewart, a granddaughter.

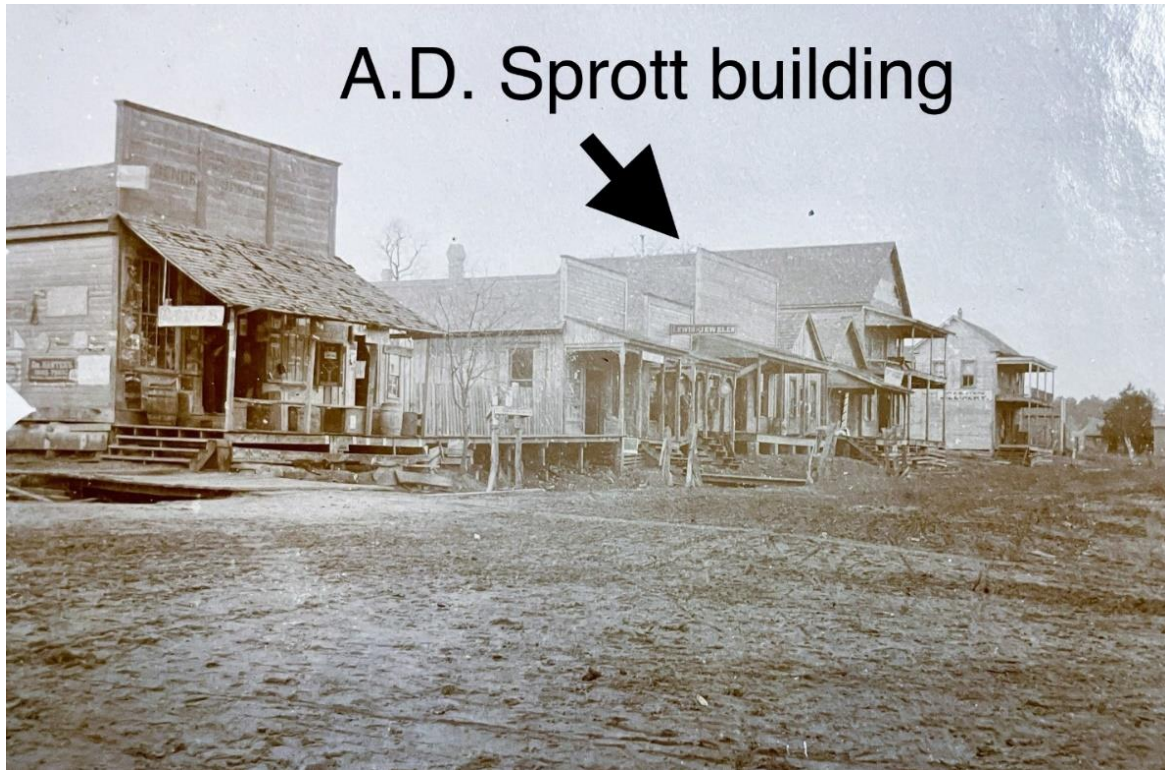
A.D. Sprott, Jr. later purchased the south one-half of lots 5 and 6, (53.5' along Washington by 107' deep) from T.L. Epperson on August 24, 1899, for the sum of \$200. The 1900 Livingston census listed Sprott as a merchant. He was from a pioneer farming family that lived on the Trinity River at Mills Lake. This was located on the old public road that ran from Beacon Bay to Memorial Point and is now under Lake Livingston.

Sprott, joined by his wife, Maggie Josey Sprott, then sold the north 21.5 feet to Walter Marshall for \$300 on August 12, 1901. Walter Marshall was listed in 1900 Census as a day laborer, and it is believed that he lived on this lot with his new bride, Colita "Lita" Sawyer, the daughter of T.M. Sawyer, a local

sawmill, gristmill, and gin operator. (see Sawyer story)

The newspapers that reported on the 1902 fire indicated that the Marshall's lost a \$600 house in the fire. This was on the location of The Vault, an event space located at 415 N. Washington Avenue. (see story about this building)

At the time of the fire, A.D. Sprott owned a building that housed a drug store located at 413 N. Washington, the subject property. According to newspaper articles in The Houston Post, The Marshall Messenger, and The Shiner Gazette, among others, Sprott lost a \$5,000 building and stock. T.D. Wilson, a druggist as per the 1900 census, also lost \$2,000 in stock. It is presumed that he was a tenant in the Sprott building.



1900 location of the Livingston Drug Company

After the fire, in 1904, T.D. Wilson acquired the Sprott interest in the drug store lot for \$1,000. Because of this large price, it is believed that the new wooden, two-story building was standing at this time. Wilson operated his drug store business there. Apparently, he sold intoxicating liquors as well. At this time, because of the prohibition election of August 30, 1902, two days after the fire, this was in violation of the local option law. For this infraction, he was convicted and sentenced to twenty days in jail and a \$25 fine on April 16, 1904.

By 1906, both of the two lots were owned by F.K. Leggett, who was the District Clerk at the time. In 1903 he bought the Marshall lot and on July 10, 1906, he bought the drugstore building from T.D. Wilson for \$2,000. Within the deed was a non-compete clause that stated that Wilson would not engage in the drug business in Livingston.

This was the birth of Livingston Drug Company.

At this time there existed a second drug store in town, The City Drug Store, owned by L.A. McKinnon. It was a continuation of Dr. B.C. Marsh's old store and was located around the corner on Church Street where the Gilliland building now stands. In 1909 a third store was opened next door to McKinnon, the Capital Pharmacy, owned by A.J. Peebles and his brother-in-law, J.H. McKee.



1911 County Fair parade, Liv Drug Company, two-story building in the center

F.K. Leggett brought in his nephew, W. W. Leggett, as a pharmacist and in January of 1907, W.W., as a member of the Livingston Drug Company, left to enter medical college in Louisville, Kentucky.

In February 1907, the Polk County Enterprise announced that T.D. Wilson and wife, Nellie, had moved to Corpus Christi where he bought the Corpus Christi Drug Company.

In May 1907, the paper announced that Dr. R.B. Love, physician, and surgeon, was now located in the Livingston Drug Co. building. Love had recently moved to Livingston from Shepherd in 1904 to associate with longtime Livingston doctor and druggist, B.C. Marsh, who had his offices around the corner on lot 2 of the same block. Love married Ola Greer, the daughter of W.W. Greer, in 1905. They were the parents of Ola Bergman.

On October 9, 1907, W.W. Leggett married Daisy Morrison and soon after, her brother, Ollege Morrison was employed at the drug company. The paper announced in October 1909 that "Ollie" would be leaving for Dallas where he went to take a course in pharmacy.

Improvements to the store made headlines in June 1909 in the form of a lady's ice cream parlor, a cozy little corner with electric fans.

On October 5, 1909, F.K. Leggett sold the business to his nephew W.W. Leggett and his brother-in-law, Ollie, for \$2,000. F.K. Leggett resigned as District Clerk in January 1910 and moved to Elgin where he installed an ice plant.

F.K. Leggett later owned the Lone Star Amusement Company and was contracted to bring the carnival to the 5<sup>th</sup> Polk County Fair in 1913. The Enterprise reported that his company had been showing in large towns around the state and is one of the cleanest and best organizations of its kind on the road.

Ollie Morrison recalled in 1938 that he made most of the deliveries and operated the soda fountain. He also filled some of the prescriptions. "We alternated the work, one of us staying on the job all of the time. Our rest periods were spent upstairs in the two-story frame building that the store was in. Equipment at that time was not modern. We had an old wall fountain, using salt and ice for refrigeration and a cradle type rocker for carbonation. There was no water system then."

"Our drinks were soda water, orange, lemon and strawberry, some Coca Cola and Dr Pepper and lemonade. The Coca Cola had to be made in two glasses, like you would fix a bromo seltzer. We bought vanilla and strawberry ice cream in five gallon lots and they lasted quite a while."

In January 1910, the paper announced that Drs. E.D. Drew and R.L. Buvens, have moved their dental office upstairs and are "fixing their office up in style and hope to have one of the best dental parlors in East Texas." In March 1910, the paper reported that they had installed a dental lathe that is run by an electric motor. Buvens was a member of several of the Livingston semi-pro baseball teams and Dr. Drew was the manager of these teams. (see baseball story)

In August 1910, W.W. Leggett bought, for eight hundred dollars, a home from J.W. Cochran, located on the south ¼ of block 25 across from the Nettles Hotel, the location of the old Dairy 59 or the current Indulge Kitchen. This was later sold in 1919 to Dr. H. Bergman and he built his second hospital on this site in 1922.

In December 1910, the Drug Company was advertising a free goldfish and glass globe with the purchase of a twenty-five-cent bottle of "Ineeda Antiseptic".

Their advertisement of March 20, 1911, stated "We started in business five years ago. The first year our sales were about one-half as much as they are

at present.” The following month it was reported that they had added a large display window to the front of their building from which they will arrange a nice display of drugs and other articles. In May of 1911 they placed a new boardwalk in front of their store. This was before the days of concrete sidewalks which appeared around 1914.

Meanwhile, two doors north, the Unique Picture Show, owned by K.W. Jackson and L.A. McKinnon, had just completed their building on the lot owned by H.B. and T.B. Davis, next to their Davis Brothers store on the corner. The new moving picture show opened on May 5, 1911, in the first purpose-built movie theater in Livingston. It was sold in September of the same year to C.F. Fain and M.S. Cayton and renamed The Happy Hour Theater. Under the ownership of the Fain family, it remained in business until a fire in the late 1940's. In 1947, H.B. Davis sold the lot and it became the White Kitchen Cafe in 1950. (see story about theaters)

The Houston Post reported on November 13, 1911, that The Livingston Drug Company had installed an electric automatic carbonator for their soda fountain.

In May 1913, W.W. Leggett was elected to serve on the Board of Aldermen as Treasurer for the City of Livingston.

1914 was a big year for downtown Livingston! The Enterprise of February 5<sup>th</sup> announced that three more new "bricks" would be built. The Davison family, led by son-in-law J.W. Leggett, Jr., was contracting to build a business house to the north of their 1910 building that was built for and rented to the Guaranty State Bank, on the northeast corner of Church and Washington (block 22, lot 1). It is now occupied by Downtown Treasures.

The 1914 Leggett building, completed in June, was the ninth brick building in Livingston. It is now occupied by Good Golly Miss Molly's antique emporium.

The Drug Co. was set to build the tenth and W.W. Greer was building the eleventh brick building that would adjoin the drug store on the north.

"Livingston will no doubt be the leading town of East Texas within a few years, as evidenced by the number of new buildings that will be erected in the near future" proclaimed the Enterprise!

The Houston Post of March 13, 1914, reported that the Drug Co. building plans had been received from architects, Jones & Tabor of Houston. The Enterprise of February 5<sup>th</sup> advised that the first floor will be used for the drug store, which will be equipped with the most modern fixtures. Everything will be so arranged as to make it sanitary in every particular. The prescription department will be on the second floor and will make it strictly private, this being a feature that will add much to the business of this firm.

On March 19, 1914, the Drug Co. announced via the Enterprise that they would be building a two-story building, twenty-two x seventy feet, at a cost of \$5,700. The drug store would be on the first floor and the second floor would be divided into ten offices for their pharmacy, physicians, and other professional men. The building would have large plate glass show windows with a tile floor. A ten-foot buffet was installed in the center of the building. A new and modern iceless fountain was installed as well as new show cases and fixtures. The old frame building would be moved to another location.

The April 2, 1914 Enterprise revealed that the old two story drug company building was being moved next to the City Bakery, to be a new moving picture theater. John Burgess was equipping it with modern fixtures. Called The Elite, this gave Livingston two theaters. Burgess advertised that free ice water was to be served by the ushers and that "The Harper Mystery" would show on May 21, 1914.

By August, the theater had failed and Will H. Matthews was converting the two-story building on Washington Avenue, which was formerly occupied by the Elite Picture Show, into a rooming house. His advertisement of August 13, 1914, stated that the lower floor could be used as a business house. By September 10<sup>th</sup>, the building had ten rooms upstairs and ten downstairs and was offered for rent to those who desire to do light housekeeping. The Enterprise article suggested that there was quite a demand for rent houses.

By September 1915, the Livingston Rooming House had been converted to a grocery store with partner N.T. Green. In 1916 Matthews advertised a moving picture outfit for sale, complete with chairs and electric fans.

It is the theory of the writer that the Drug Company/Elite Theater/Livingston Rooming House/Matthews Grocery building was situated on Block 23, in the current location of Katie's Cafe and Bakery. The title to the property was not in Matthews' name so it makes it difficult to pinpoint this to one hundred percent accuracy but based on the photo of the building, this conclusion is drawn.



Circa 1914, the two-story building in the middle of the photo is believed by the writer to be the old Livingston Drug building. Notice the shade that was built across the front of the building that would make it better for a theater.

The April 9, 1914, Enterprise advised that the Drug Co. had moved, temporarily, into the newly completed Davison-Leggett building. The building also housed a barber, E.L. Williamson, proprietor of City Barber Shop, and the Silver Moon Cafe, which was owned by Ed Welch and Treat Martin.



The April 16, 1914, Enterprise stated "It seems that the building of brick buildings in Livingston has really begun. While we have had several handsome brick business houses for some time, there has been a need and demand for more brick buildings to take the place of the old wooden structures. Since the Livingston Drug Co let their contract for a handsome, two-story brick building, Mr. W.W. Greer had decided to build a handsome, two-story brick to

take the place of the wooden building on his lot, now occupied by the New York Bargain Store.”

Greer built on the old Marshall lot to the north of the drug store that he bought from Leggett and Morrison on May 8, 1914. His new building joined walls with the drug store building and when opened, in September 1914, was re-occupied by the New York Bargain store. (see story about this building)

By May 7, 1914 work had begun on the two buildings and the Enterprise advised that “the work will be rushed through as quickly as possible and when these two buildings are completed it will give that side of Main street quite a different appearance that it had when the old wooden buildings stood on that site”.

The Enterprise of June 18, 1914, announced that the Livingston Drug Co. had opened their doors in their handsome new brick building and invited the public to visit them in their new home. From four o’clock to ten o’clock they served free drinks from their handsome new soda fountain, which “without a doubt is one of the finest in East Texas”.

Music was furnished by the Livingston Orchestra throughout the evening. The place was crowded, and many compliments were paid to Messrs. Leggett and Morrison, the proprietors, for designing and erecting such a handsome building.

“The Livingston Drug Company has a place that is as up to date as any city drug store. The front of the building is finished in pressed brick, the floor is tile, and the prescription department is situated on a mezzanine floor.”

“Glass top tables and showcases with marble bases add much to the attractiveness of the place. The soda fountain, which was installed in this place, cost something near \$2,500 and is of white marble with onyx trimming. The other fixtures are all of light oak finish.”

Doctors H. Bergman, R.B. Love and Dentist M.M. Baker had offices on the second floor of the building. There was a surgeon’s room there and this facility was the predecessor to today’s hospital.



Parade photo, approximately 1918

And as if this were not enough excitement, on June 22, 1914, Ollie was married to Minnie Murphy, daughter of Edward Murphy of Moscow. At this time, Minnie was a schoolteacher in Livingston.

Ollie and Minnie left for their honeymoon to Colorado via the midnight train.



Ollie and Minnie honeymoon at Seven Falls, Colorado

Minnie continued to teach second grade for a great number of years. The Houston Post of August 16, 1915, announced that the new classroom addition of four new classrooms had been added to the Livingston High School and that her brother, E.T. Murphy, had come to Livingston from Moscow to become School Superintendent. E.T. Murphy later served as Polk County Judge during the very prosperous years from 1918 to 1926. Under his leadership, the first bridge across the Trinity River on the new "Airline Highway" from Houston to Shreveport was built as well as the new courthouse. He later served as a State Representative. He and his wife, Gertrude Blodgett Murphy were responsible for the founding of the Murphy Memorial Library.

Ollie and Minnie bought the interest of W.W. Leggett for \$3,750 on January 27, 1919, and became sole owners of the drug store.



The October 4, 1924 Dallas Morning News reported that three new homes were going up in Livingston. Ollie and Minnie built a lovely new two-story home on the northwest corner of block 24, at the intersection of Washington and Milam. This home, owned by Jerry and Mona Marsh since 1971, will be celebrating one hundred years in 2024. The article mentioned that W.W. Greer (Ola Bergman home on Washington) and J.L. Muller (Steven Evans home on North Street) were being built.

Livingston had long been a large tomato growing county and by the late 1920's was shipping large quantities (148 railcars in 1930) by rail out of downtown Livingston. The tomato sheds were

situated on the lot behind the Cochran and Gerlach stores (Whistlestop Cafe) and in the railyard behind La Casita restaurant on South Washington. Both sheds were serviced by the Waco, Beaumont, Trinity, and Sabine railroad which first came to Livingston as the Beaumont and Great Northern Railway in 1908.

In 1929, Hill Morrison, brother of Ollie, was the Secretary of the Polk County Truck Growers Association that represented eighty local farmers. During these years, the Livingston Drug Company was the distributor of the Marglobe and Gulf State seeds for the tomato production. The store sold a large variety of items, such as Devoe paint and goldfish, which were not typical of a drug store.



In 1930 Ollie was elected Mayor of Livingston. He succeeded Carl Sory, the Ford dealer, who served for ten years prior. The Aldermen at the time were Les Marshall, Dr. H. Bergman, Sam Moroney, E.C. Carnes, and S.J. Cannon. Morrison served as Mayor until 1940.



1938 Alabama-Coushatta 1<sup>st</sup> Pow Wow parade

Mr. Morrison became involved with the Guaranty State Bank, established in 1910 and evolved into the First State Bank in 1925. Ollie served as President of the bank from 1940 to 1946. The bank was housed in the building next to his drugstore and Morrison had a doorway cut between the two buildings to allow for an easier pathway between the two.

Morrison was a very devoted Livingston businessman and was extensively involved with the Chamber of Commerce. During his years with the Drug Company, both the City Hall and The Chamber

were located on the second floor of the bank. Morrison was also an active Rotarian.

In 1948, Morrison sold The Livingston Drug Company to long time employee Roger Merritt Meece. He retained ownership of the building, however. Roger's son, Roger Monroe Meece, worked in the store with this father for many years.



1954, Mary Ann Crawford, John Gardner, Beverly Thomason, Eddie Martin, and Bob Cook among others enjoying the soda fountain

The drug store was a place of merriment for the town people, especially the teenagers of the era. Many photos exist of high school students enjoying the soda fountain.

For numerous years, beginning in the late 1940's, Dr W.W. Flowers had his office on the third floor. Dr. C.S. Murphy and Dr. T.L. Gardner had their offices on the second floor. Dr. Gardner was elected to the Livingston city council in 1957 and served for twenty years. He practiced medicine at this location until his death in 1986 at age eighty-one.

Ollie Morrison died on February 1, 1970, and just a few months later, on July 16, 1970, Minnie expired. Upon their deaths, The Morrison Foundation was established to provide college scholarships for local students. Over the past fifty years the foundation has given millions of dollars to this worthy cause.

In 1974 Meece sold the business to John P. Thompson, a pharmacist from Jena, Louisiana. Thompson bought the building from the Morrison Estate in 1976. Thompson later served on the City Council from 1983 to 1991 when he was elected Polk County Judge. He served in that position for 24

years. Thompson sold the drug store building in January 1988 thus ending a downtown institution that lasted for eighty-three years.

The current owners, the Gulleys, have restored the building to its former glory of 1914 and it has become a mainstay in the revitalization of historic downtown Livingston. We are fortunate to have citizens like them.

