Overview

The central business district of Manchester is historically referred to as "Exchange Place," a term derived from the 1820 plat of Manchester, and applied to what is now labeled "Main Street." Stephen and James Harvey Fargo's remaining vacant parcels of downtown land from thirty-one John Gilbert Street on November 27, 1833, and immediately launched commercial developments along the street during the first economic boom of 1835–1845. Exchange Place became the commercial core of the town, centered on East Main between Clinton and Main Street, and the one block of Adrian Street south of Main. The history of Exchange Place encompasses three distinct periods in the village's development.

1. 1833–1853, beginning with the original grist and saw mills along the River Raisin, the Fargo and Fargo General Store, and a subsequent commercial infrastructure that served the needs of the early settlers on Exchange Place. The May 1832 fire in the grist mill, caused by the spontaneous combustion of accumulated grain dust, destroyed a large number of the original buildings, particularly along the north side of Exchange Place.

2. 1853–1945, consisting of significant Italianate brick construction, particularly during the post-Civil War economic boom in Manchester. Many of these buildings exist today, contributing to our charming downtown appearance. The buildings were derived from the 1837 Second Plat of Manchester, historically referred to as "Exchange Place," a term that provided the immediate draw to the area and attracted settlers to Manchester. For this reason, "Exchange Place" was considered to be the "heart and center" of the village. During this period, local merchant activity and retail expansion continued. The rapid pace of new buildings and expanded dimensions led to conflicts over survey boundaries from the original 1833 survey. C. Division House, a professor from the University of Michigan and surveyor, was brought in to complete a new survey of Manchester in 1873. A later reap of a detailed inventory of existing buildings and contemporary merchants/businesses.

3. 1945–present, whereas a few of the Italianate buildings were removed due to obsolescence and aging, and replaced with more contemporary buildings. The retail environment, changed, several buildings moved into service usage, and the development of Exchange Place became "Main Street" as addresses were assigned by utility companies. The height of local retail options and activity occurred during this period.

The Early Years

The development of Manchester along the River Raisin at this location reflected the significant water level drop along the river, a critical need for the construction of watermill-powered industries. This need was fulfilled by the construction of watermill-powered industries on Exchange Place. The Exchange Place commercial structures were constructed of an orange-colored brick, which is known to have been made from local clay at the east end of Exchange Place.

The Post-Civil War Boom

Manchester Enterprise, said in 1866 – "Let's build the Town on the Town!" Community organizations such as the Masonic Lodge, provided meeting places for community organizations such as the Masonic Lodge.

The Exchange Place commercial center focused its peak of retail activity during the 1880s. Most construction on Exchange Place occurred by 1894, when the Union Bank and Savings Building (now Comerica Bank) was built at the southeast corner of East Main and Adrian Streets. For the following fifty years, the district, officially known as Exchange Place until 1925, saw little change in the retail landscape. The Exchange Place commercial center focused its peak of retail activity during the 1880s. Most construction on Exchange Place occurred by 1894, when the Union Bank and Savings Building (now Comerica Bank) was built at the southeast corner of East Main and Adrian Streets. For the following fifty years, the district, officially known as Exchange Place until 1925, saw little change in the retail landscape.

The Later Years

Beginning in the late 1880s, several new buildings altered the post-Civil War Italianate architecture along Exchange Place. Portions of the large Goodyear House at the northeast corner of East Main and Clinton Streets were removed, and replaced with the gas station/convenience store which exists today as Marathon. The Widmayer Building was built in 1894 opposite this on Main Street, when the local hardware store moved to the east end of Exchange Place were torn down and replaced with the C. F. Smith Grocery Store in 1918, which now became the site of the new Savings Bank and Main Office building.

Most of the Germans came from the Wuerttemberg area in southern Germany. Many knew each other in their native villages, and had developed skilled trades, both on the farms and in the village, to create a self-sufficient community. The common language and culture, the large number and steady stream of new immigrants, and the establishment of several Evangelical Lutheran churches by Pastor Frederick Schniedt enabled the German community to become a cohesive unit. By the 1890s, German merchants has established a major presence on Exchange Place.

William Baxter – Manchester’s Longest Operating Merchant

Among the 19th century businesses located on Manchester’s Exchange Place, the historic of longest operating was on Exchange Place. William Baxter, an early settler and businessman, operated his store on the north side of Exchange Place at 134-136 E. Main Street, most recently the Burton Insurance Agency and the office / residence of the Four Corners Hardware and the office / residence of the Four Corners Hardware. For this reason, "Exchange Place" was considered to be the "heart and center" of the village. During this period, local merchant activity and retail expansion continued. The rapid pace of new buildings and expanded dimensions led to conflicts over survey boundaries from the original 1833 survey. C. Division House, a professor from the University of Michigan and surveyor, was brought in to complete a new survey of Manchester in 1873. A later reap of a detailed inventory of existing buildings and contemporary merchants/businesses.

For the adults, was extended to all who entered, whether or not they made a purchase. The term “dry goods” refers to textiles, ready-to-wear clothing and notions, both on the farms and in the village, to create a self-sufficient community.

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