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Patterson emerges as one of Arkadelphia's early businessmen

By Wendy Richter
For the Siftings

Among Arkadelphia's early businessmen was a man named John Wesley Patterson. For about two-thirds of his life Patterson operated a mercantile business in Arkadelphia. A man of habits and routines, he had relatively few interests outside of his stores, but actively supported both the town's high school and college teams.

John Wesley Patterson was born in 1857. His parents had come to the Dallas County area in 1852. At seventeen, J.W. went to work at a mercantile in nearby Princeton earning a whopping eighteen dollars a month. Always interested in making money, he saved one-half of his earnings by sleeping in the back of the store. After a few months in Princeton, Patterson returned home to help his father on the family farm. However, he quickly realized farming was not for him. He knew he wanted to be in business. So, in 1875, Patterson went to work for S.R. "Rush" McNutt, one of Arkadelphia's most energetic businessmen.

At McNutt's mercantile, J.W. Patterson met Luke Gibney. The two hit it off and became good friends. With an investment of

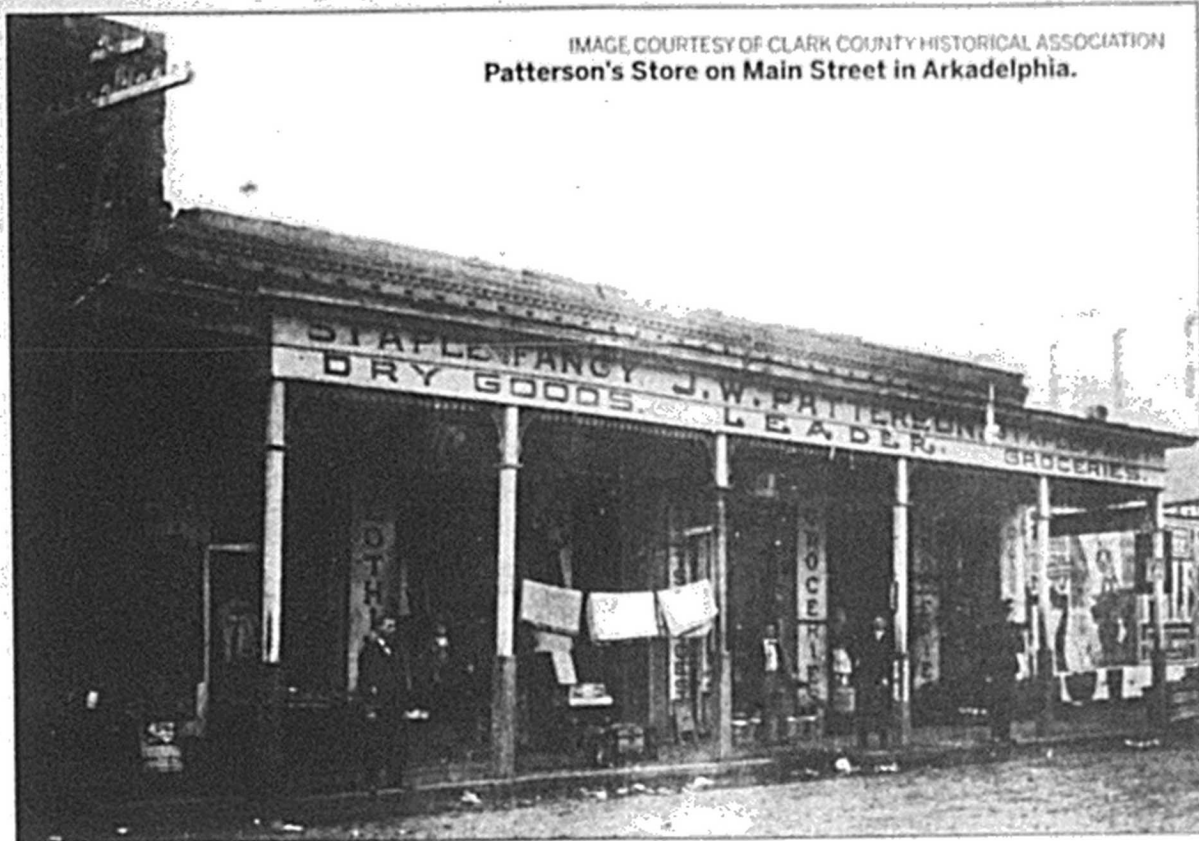


IMAGE COURTESY OF CLARK COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
Patterson's Store on Main Street in Arkadelphia.

\$2000 they opened a dry goods store in Arkadelphia. The men established ties in their personal lives as well, marrying sisters Cosie and Emma Husbands. The couples lived on Pine Street—the Pattersons at 1055 and the Gibneys at 1022, across the street from each other.

John W. Patterson was ambi-

tious, and wanted to expand his interests. He bought Gibney's interest in the store, purchased an adjacent lot, added on to his existing building, and opened a grocery store. The business grew, and Patterson later established a men's store, which he called The Model. He staffed his stores with bright and friendly sales-

people, and stocked clothing of a high quality.

Patterson acquired an interest in S.R. McNutt's Arkadelphia Cotton Mill and invested in the Elk Horn Bank. He served as a director and vice-president of the bank. Patterson was a member of the Arkadelphia Methodist Church, serving as a trustee and

steward. He was also a loyal supporter of Arkadelphia Methodist College (now Henderson State University). On a personal level, Patterson helped deserving young people with their college expenses.

John W. Patterson was known as a man with "certain unchanging habits and routines." For example, at precisely 2:55 p.m., he would put the day's cash in a wooden cigar box, light a cigar, and walk one-half block to the bank to make a deposit. Another habit was to have baths on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Most men of the time bathed once a week, but Patterson bathed twice—and always on the same days.

John W. Patterson died at his home on July 25, 1932, after a brief illness. Almost two-thirds of his life had been spent in business in Arkadelphia. He was buried in Rose Hill Cemetery.

To learn more about Clark County history, visit or contact the Clark County Historical Museum (www.clarkcountyhistory.org or 230.1360) or the Clark County Historical Association's Archives at the Ouachita Baptist University Library (www.obu.edu/archives or 245.5332).