



In the late 1860s, **Isaac Dockery** built a brick kiln near Sevierville and established a masonry business. Born a free Black man, Dockery moved to Sevierville to work as a merchant clerk for a white businessman, Henry M. Thomas, before the Civil War. After the war, Dockery's masonry business began booming. He taught the brick masonry craft to his sons, sons-in-law, and grandsons, many of whom went on to begin their own successful masonry and construction companies in the area. Together, the family was responsible for nearly every important late nineteenth and early

twentieth century private and public building in the county.

Several members of Dockery's family also became well-known brick masons and contractors in Sevierville, including **Paris Witt McMahan**, a formerly enslaved person who established the Riverside Steam Brick Company that operated near Sevierville until the 1930s; **George and Stewart Burden**, whose highly productive construction company produced iconic Sevierville structures such as the original Central Hotel; and **Joe Leak McMahan, Sr.**

Perhaps the most notable of Dockery's descendants was **Fred McMahan**, who

attended Knoxville College in the late 1910s and later earned his master's degree in architectural engineering at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. Around 1920, he returned to Sevierville and established the J.F. & N. McMahan Construction Company with his brothers, **James and Newt McMahan**.

One of the most prolific Black builders and brick masons in the state, McMahan and his construction company were responsible for scores of Sevier County buildings, including the Pleasant View Rosenwald School in 1921-22.

## SEVIERVILLE BRICK *Walking Tour*

Many of downtown Sevierville's important structures were the work of the city's late 19th and early 20th century African American owned masonry and construction companies. Learn about the Dockery-McMahan family and explore their structural legacy that remains in Sevierville.



For more information  
**865.453.6411**



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TENNESSEE**  
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## SEVIERVILLE BRICK *Walking Tour*



A Historic Walking Tour Highlighting  
Sevierville's African American Builders and Craftsmen

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**1 Sevier County Courthouse (1896)**  
125 Court Avenue

Built in 1896, using bricks from Isaac Dockery's kiln, the Beaux Arts style courthouse is arguably the most iconic structure in Sevierville. Its brick walls are 13 inches thick, with a limestone block foundation. This was Sevier County's fifth and current courthouse. Previous wooden courthouses had burned resulting in the loss of important legal records.



County Court was so impressed with the bricks Dockery had recently manufactured for Murphy College (1891), they selected his company to supply brick for the new courthouse, constructed by McDonald Brothers of Louisville, Kentucky. At the kiln on Allensville Road, Dockery's workers loaded the bricks on a mule-drawn wagon to travel the two miles to the courthouse construction site.

**2 Old Sevierville Hardware (1915)**

128 Court Avenue

Built in 1915, the fixtures installed in the two-story brick building were the latest style which included rolling ladders, scales, and wall drawers for small items. After 70 years, the left side, which was built over the old town ditch, had sank over a foot. To restore the building, each brick was carefully removed, the structure righted, and the brick reinstalled. The interior was left as it was when Sevierville Hardware sold Jackson Wagons, Greener Action Loading Shotguns, and Duro Cook Wear. The owners and occupants have meticulously maintained the historic character of the space which served as Sevierville Hardware from the time it was built until 1986.



**3 Old Bank of Sevierville (1901)**

150 Court Avenue

Founded in 1888, the Bank of Sevierville relocated to Court Avenue in 1901 following a tragic attempted robbery in 1899 at their original location on Main Street. A building committee was appointed by the board of directors in 1900 and the new building was completed the following year. Constructed of unique yellowish-tan brick and featuring four brick columns and intricately detailed woodwork on the front façade, it is the oldest building on Court Avenue. In order to create the unusual brick color requested for the bank, Isaac Dockery set up a kiln a mile west of town (where Chapman Highway is now) that provided the necessary soil color. Not only did the bank feature a well-designed exterior, it was also equipped with the latest fixtures. To adequately care for the bank's securities and other valuables, there was a 12-foot square, steel-lined vault containing a smaller safe and 50 deposit boxes. Later, the vault was used by Max Richardson's Jewelry. The bank moved out of the building in 1967.



**4 Miller Yett Building (1906)**  
160 Court Avenue

In August 1906, Miller Yett contracted Isaac Dockery and his sons-in-law to build for him a building with an entrance at the corner of Cross Street (now Court Avenue) and Bruce Street. Dockery set up a temporary kiln near the West Prong of the Little Pigeon River to make the bricks. M. Yett & Sons (Stewart and John Yett) sold a variety of merchandise including clothes, shoes, tools, and groceries. His son Stewart and his wife lived upstairs. Miller Yett exchanged the building, store and stock for 900 acres in Alabama in 1912. He was dissatisfied in Alabama and moved back to Sevierville in 1914 to operate a real estate business. He later moved to Knoxville. The store was purchased by a group of investors in 1913 and renamed the Corner Store.



**5 Ogle Building (1920)**

101 Bruce Street

Built in 1920 by A. R. McMurry Construction Company of Knoxville, the lumber was provided by A.J. King, Sr. and M.B. McMahan II. Bricks were made in a local kiln owned and operated by J.F. & N. McMahan Co. The first business to occupy the building was Purity Drug Company. In 1923, the First National Bank of Sevierville opened in this building but did not survive the Great Depression. First National Bank was sold at public auction to Robert Seaton, Attorney at law, along with Dr. Casper P. Wilson and Dr. Otha H. Yarberry. Dr. Wilson used the front ground floor for his office, clinic, and operating room, while Dr. Yarberry occupied the rear of the first floor. Robert Seaton's law offices and the medical facilities of Dr. Roy A. McCall were upstairs. Later, The Fashion House, a women's dress shop, was located on the ground floor for several years before W. Henry Ogle, Attorney at law, purchased the property in 1977 and named it the Ogle Building. Today this building is the corporate headquarters of Ole Smoky Distillery. This was the first downtown building completed by J.F. & N. McMahan Construction Company.



**6 Trotter Motor Company (1920)**

127 Bruce Street

James Coy Trotter was the first automobile dealer in Sevierville. His Ford dealership was located on the south side of Bruce Street as early as 1914. In 1920, he commissioned J.F. & N. McMahan Construction Company to make the bricks and build J.C. Trotter Motor Company. In 1930, Isenberg Motor Company purchased Trotter's Ford Agency stock and Sam Isenberg built another building next door to expand the dealership. The buildings in which J.C. Trotter Motor Company and Isenberg Motor Company operated have been remodeled numerous times



and housed several businesses. As a nod to history and complete renovation, Trotter's Whole Hog BBQ opened in the historic dealership building in 2022.

**7 Sevierville Post Office (1940)**

167 Bruce Street

A Colonial Revival style building, the Sevierville Post Office was built through the Works Progress Administration in 1940 for \$75,000. Federal architect Louis A. Simon designed the building based on a standardized architectural plan for federal post offices constructed throughout the country between 1934 and 1943. The building was constructed by J.F. & N. McMahan Construction Company. Because they were chosen by the federal government for the project, Fred McMahan was especially proud of this building. Today the old Sevierville Post Office is home to the Sevier County Heritage Museum.



**8 John Sevier Motor Company (1930)**

221 Parkway

Built by J. F. & N. McMahan Construction Company using plans drawn by Fred McMahan, Townsend Motor Company opened on April 18, 1930. The electrical equipment and plumbing fixtures were purchased from Sevierville Electric and Plumbing Company and Sevierville Hardware. The woodwork and doors were furnished by A.J. King Lumber Company, and K. Rawlings Company supplied the furniture. Townsend Motor Company, operated by Buford Townsend, offered \$500 (a sum equal to just over \$8,000 today) for the best name for the accompanying filling station, and the name John Sevier Service Station was chosen.



Townsend Motor Company remained in business for only three years before selling to Watson Motor Company. In addition to being a Chevrolet dealership, Watson Motor Company operated a complete repair shop and wrecker service. In 1937, John Sevier Motor Company, owned by E.W. Paine and Hugh Webb, bought the business and carried Chevrolet and Oldsmobile cars. In 1960, John Sevier Motor Company went out of business, and later Walker-Smith Chevrolet Company occupied the building. Today the building is a body repair shop.

**9 Dwight & Kate Wade House (1940)**

114 Jay Street

One of the most important buildings that Fred McMahan constructed may be the Dwight and Kate Wade House, which was finished in the autumn of 1940. J.F. & N. Construction both made the brick and built this home, which is a near replica of the Garden Home showcased at the 1939



New York World's Fair "Town of Tomorrow" exhibit. It is also the first documented Town of Tomorrow house to have been built in Tennessee. Designed by Vera Cook Salomonsky, a prominent female New York City architect, the Wade's purchased the plans for this home while visiting the 1939-40 World's Fair on their honeymoon. The couple resided there together until Kate's passing in 2004. Dwight continued living in the house until 2008 when he passed away at the age of 101.

**10 The Pines Theater (1928)**

230 Court Avenue

Operated by Myrtle Waters, The Pines Theater opened in 1944 in a building originally built by J.F. & N. McMahan Construction Company for her husband, J.B. Waters, Sr., in 1928. (Prior to 1944, the building housed Watson Motor Company). The theater seated 700 people and had the latest projection equipment, a large stage with controlled curtains and state-of-the-art lighting. In addition to motion pictures, the theater often featured live performances. Among those who appeared were Archie Campbell, The Carlisle Brothers, Hotshot Elmer, Chet Atkins, Roy Acuff, The Carter Family, and a young Dolly Parton who played her first playing gig at The Pines.



**11 Original Murphy College Building (1891)**

226 Cedar Street

Completed by Isaac Dockery, the brickwork on Murphy College, which opened in 1892, was Dockery's first major commercial construction project and cemented his reputation in the community. The decorative woodwork on the eaves was designed by Lewis Buckner, who lived in an unfinished room in the building while working on the project. Originally, Murphy College was constructed as an auspice of the Methodist-Episcopal Church with three teachers and a principal. At the dedication ceremony Col. James C. Murphy and his son William C. Murphy announced they would contribute \$1000. When Col. Murphy died the following year, the school was named in his memory. The subscription school offered courses from primary grades to college courses. Dr. E.A. Bishop arrived in 1912 to serve as president and led the expansion of the institution. The college moved to a new site on Park Rd. in 1923 and its last class graduated in 1935. The short-lived Sevierville Business College moved into the building after the college relocated. The Sevierville Elementary School also used the building for several years. Currently the renovated building is the headquarters of the Sevier County Board of Education.



## AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTISTRY

**Paris deWitt McMahan Brick**

An example of a brick made by Paris deWitt McMahan at the brick manufacturing plant he established, Riverside Steam Brick Company, in Sevierville. This brick is believed to have been recovered from the Sevierville Hardware building during a restoration project. The Riverside Steam Brick Company made many of the bricks used on the facades of the historic downtown buildings. McMahan, who later became the son-in-law of Isaac Dockery, was born into slavery and separated from his mother and siblings at an early age. Found alone and crying, McMahan was purchased by a Sevierville slaveowner, James L. McMahan, who taught him the trade of brick masonry.



**Isaac Dockery Brick**

Discovered during the demolition of Sevierville's Masonic Temple, this brick bears the initials of Isaac Dockery and the date 1871. During the Civil War, Dockery was captured by Confederate soldiers and told he would be severely punished if he did not reveal the whereabouts of his employer's grandson, Union Army Col. M.P. Thomas. When he refused, Dockery was tied to the back of a horse and dragged through the streets in an effort to get the information. After still refusing to reveal the information - and with the Confederate soldiers believing him to be dead, his body was cut free. Miraculously, Dockery survived and went on to establish a brick masonry enterprise that defined the architecture of downtown Sevierville.



**Lewis Buckner Woodwork**

(also listed under #11 - Murphy College)

Although not a brick mason, Lewis S. Buckner's artistry and craftsmanship has earned his place in Tennessee history. Born into slavery, Lewis Buckner learned his woodworking trade in Sevierville as an apprentice to Christian H. Stump, a white furniture and cabinetmaker originally from Michigan. Buckner opened his own cabinet making business in the 1870s in Sevierville and by the late nineteenth century was building houses throughout Sevier County that featured robust Italianate and Queen Anne style architectural elements.

