

Livery stables provided much-needed service before the automobile

By Rebekah Davis  
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Long before Enterprise would “pick you up” in a rented Ford Mustang, Athens residents could rent their very own mustang downtown... only it was the one-horsepower version. Folks who needed to use a horse and wagon for the day or the week could check in with W.T. McDonald’s Livery on the south side of the Square, at the corner of Washington and Marion Streets.

McDonald did brisk business at the livery and feed stables, which had already been in business for several years before he bought it from D.H. Moorman and Burkey in 1893. He had some experience in the business, having bought George Sherrill’s livery stable in 1890. In newspapers of the day, McDonald advertised his services of boarding horses, hiring out horses and wagons, and selling feed for the animals.

McDonald was a busy man in addition to his livery work. He was elected both alderman and cotton weigher for the city of Athens for several terms in a row, serving both of those duties at once. Perhaps that was why he participated in the Stock Parade of the 1890s, encouraging farmers to take more interest in stock and plant less cotton.

In 1897, McDonald decided to get out of the livery business. He sold the livery stables to J.W. Tilman and built a brick structure to be used a warehouse and storehouse for his wagon and vehicle business. He also rented some of the stalls of the new warehouse to Tilman Brothers. McDonald stayed away from the livery stable business for six years before returning in 1903, Brick Livery Stables then occupied by Tilman Brothers. In addition to the livery he sold fish wagons, McCormick harvesting machines, and buggies.

In the end, not even McDonald’s enterprising nature could stop the wheels of progress, however. With the invention of the automobile, his livery stable quickly became unnecessary – and in fact, most likely a stinky nuisance in a quickly-growing downtown business district – and he closed the stable doors.

In 1910, the building was razed and replaced by the L.C. Hightower building; however, McDonald’s Livery left a footprint that can still be seen today. In front of the Hightower building is a section of sidewalk that looks different from the rest, along with this plaque: “This is a section of the original sidewalk that was gridded to give horses better footing as they entered the livery stable that was here circa 1900.”

#### **About the Archives:**

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