

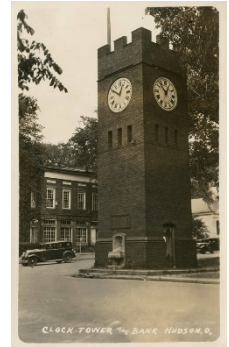


HUDSON HERITAGE ASSOCIATION

• ESTABLISHED 1962 •

The Brewster Store, 1839

Certainly, no structure in Hudson is more iconic, nor more associated with the town by both residents and visitors alike, than its historic Clock Tower. Located on the Village Green at the corner of Route 91 (Main Street) and Aurora Street, it was a gift to the town, in 1912, from its native son and later benefactor, James W. Ellsworth. This brick timepiece served, in the era of its construction, as a fitting symbol of industrial America, a nation which in the early 20th century was, like a clock, driven by standardized time and characterized by mechanical precision. Of course, given such symbolism, it sits somewhat incongruously on the northwestern corner of Hudson's common green space, itself a legacy of the community's far more agrarian roots. Still, despite the inherent irony of its geographical placement, the Clock Tower has become a beloved edifice, almost a trademark for our small city.

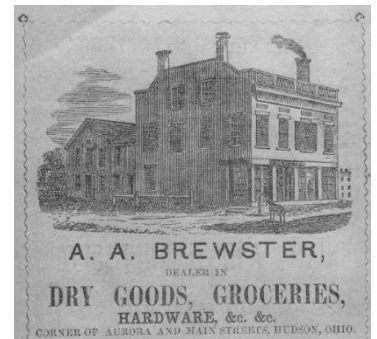


While not quite as closely identified with Hudson's history by most of its current citizens as its looming neighbor just across the street, the Brewster Store, at 5 Aurora Street, should arguably hold just as high a place of honor within our community. This simple, but nevertheless elegant, commercial property, designed and constructed by local master-builder Leander Starr in 1839, has not only held an important position within the economic life of the community for multiple generations of Hudsonites, but the property stood at the center of a public controversy in the early 1960s that invigorated efforts towards increased architectural preservation in the town and directly led to the formation of the Hudson Heritage Association in 1962.



The Brewster Store is a particularly fine example of a late Federal style brick building, featuring a sandstone foundation, stone pilasters framing the three first story windows and main entrance, and solid stone lintels topping every window. A wood entablature and balustrade accents the flat roofline on the front façade, and simple ornamental wood panels accentuate the second floor windows facing Aurora Street. A gradation in scale from the first to second story of the building contributes to a pleasing sense of overall symmetry and proportion.

The building itself was borne of a business partnership between Zenas Kent of Franklin Mills, Ohio (later renamed Kent in honor of Zenas's son, Marvin) and Anson A. Brewster of Hudson. Brewster quite clearly started out as the distinctly junior partner in this commercial endeavor. Zenas was already a well-established area merchant and possessed the necessary capital to invest in a new venture in the growing town of Hudson. However, Kent was already fully occupied with a number of other businesses he owned in Ravenna and Franklin Mills. Brewster, by contrast, was of far more modest means, but he was ambitious and proved himself both ready and willing to invest his own not inconsiderable sweat equity. Kent must have recognized that, despite Brewster's relative youth, he had the wherewithal to oversee the day-to-day operations of this new enterprise. After all, just prior to partnering with Kent, Brewster had returned to his father's farm in Hudson after having spent several years apprenticed to his uncle in the dry goods business in Washington, D.C.



Under Brewster's stewardship, the Kent and Brewster Dry Goods store prospered and became one of Hudson's most successful commercial operations. Eventually, Brewster bought out Kent's interest in the operation and became sole proprietor of the newly renamed A. A. Brewster Store. His establishment was a

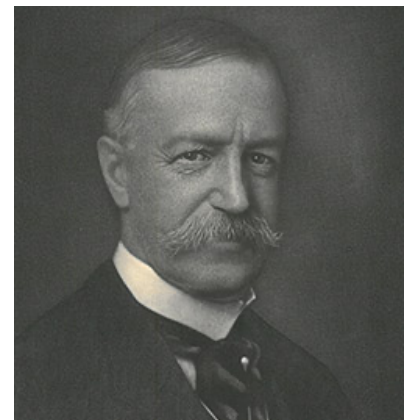


place where Hudson families could procure a wide range of goods: sugar, flour, coffee, tobacco, toiletries, clothing, tools, and hardware. The level of success enjoyed by Brewster is evidenced by the construction of a number of properties he financed along Aurora Street just to the east of his store. In 1846 he paid for the construction of a new Episcopal church. Next, on a lot situated between the church and his store, he built an elaborate high-style Gothic Revival home for his growing family (Brewster Mansion, 1853). He also purchased the house (Isham-Beebe, 1834) located just to the east of the Episcopal Church and gave it to his daughter Ellen A. Brewster Beebe as a wedding gift. This portion of lower Aurora Street became known as Brewster's Row and

represented in many respects the zenith of economic development in the town in the 19th Century.

Brewster and his wife had ten children, but their only son, John, died at the age of four, and so the business eventually passed to Brewster's son-in-law, D.D. Beebe. Beebe ran the business for several years, but Hudson in the last decades of the 1800s was on the decline. A much-anticipated railroad boom never materialized, leaving numerous bankruptcies from overoptimistic investment in its wake. Western Reserve College, a not inconsiderable economic engine, was relocated to Cleveland in 1886. Then a devastating fire destroyed much of Main Street in 1892. The next year saw the Panic of 1893, the worst financial collapse in the nation's history up to that point. The tiny preparatory school that had remained on the old campus after the college had moved up north was forced to close down operations in 1903. The very next year, the town's only remaining bank went bust.

Such was the setting for the return to Hudson of James W. Ellsworth in 1907. Ellsworth had made a considerable fortune in the coal business, but finding the rise of unions and government regulation not to his liking, he had sold off his holdings and had returned to his hometown to retire in comfortable serenity. He built an impressive private estate (named Evamere after his deceased first wife, Eva) on the grounds of his family's farm along upper Aurora Street and thereby established an enviable domestic enclave for his two young children and second wife. However, Ellsworth apparently hadn't entirely lost his appetite for entrepreneurial enterprise. Seeing the sorry state of his boyhood home, Ellsworth set about working to reverse Hudson's economic malaise. He would, in a remarkably short order, finance a number of infrastructure improvements: paving streets, installing a new sewer system, building a telephone exchange, planting hundreds of tall oaks along the major streets, wiring the town for electricity (insisting that cables either be buried or run along the back of property lines so as to keep them from impairing the fine view of the town's newly tree-lined streets), and even offering to supply free red roof tiles and white paint to any town resident interested in a little home improvement. He also personally paid for the restoration of a number of deteriorating houses. Eventually, he turned his attention to the reclamation of the vacated college campus, which at the time featured little more than crumbling buildings and overgrown lawns. This effort would eventually give birth to a revitalized Western Reserve Academy. And, of course, as mentioned earlier, he paid for the construction of a public clock tower to adorn the town's principal commercial street.



A central aim of Ellsworth's overall plan for Hudson was to reinvigorate commercial activity in the town. Updating the town's infrastructure was certainly part of this process. However, he was not one to entirely sweep away the old in favor of the new. While "historic preservation" was not a term with any true currency in

the United States in the opening decades of the last century, Ellsworth was clearly in favor of the adaptive reuse of existing structures. It was with such a notion in mind that Ellsworth purchased the, by then, rather dilapidated Brewster Store in 1908. After removing the wooden annex on its eastern side, and giving it a thorough interior overhaul, Ellsworth converted it into the new National Bank of Hudson. The building would continue to house a number of different banks over the next several decades.



By the 1960s, the bank in residence in the old Brewster Store was the First National Bank of Akron. This was during a period of extraordinary growth for Hudson. This growth was largely fueled by the construction of the Ohio Turnpike in the 1950s. In 1950, the population of the village was 1,538. An additional 1,339 people lived in the surrounding township. By 1980, those figures had increased to 4,615 and 8,030 respectively. However, in the first decade of this expansion, the town's leaders had yet to develop much of strategy for how best to manage this growth. Older housing stock and commercial buildings were both at risk of demolition. To fully understand such a risk one needs only look at the communities surrounding Hudson today, many of which let economic interests alone guide their development. Most traces of their 19th-century origins and charm has thus been lost to time, much to their detriment.

In 1962, the First National Bank of Akron's management announced plans to convert their Hudson property into a modern drive-through facility, likely sacrificing the original structure in the process. A group of concerned citizens quickly coalesced around an effort to save the venerable Brewster Store from the wrecking ball. Ultimately, they prevailed. In the process, they formed the Hudson Heritage Association (HHA), now celebrating its 60th anniversary. The HHA has gone on to become an important advocacy group promoting the benefits of preserving and protecting the many nineteenth and early twentieth century homes and commercial buildings of Hudson's historic district that, while privately owned, nevertheless collectively represent invaluable community capital. The HHA's Historical Marker Program has served to identify and catalog close to 170 of Hudson's oldest buildings and record the history of the individuals who have lived and worked in them.



The Brewster Store recently changed ownership and anyone walking or driving by it today can see the telltale signs that it is currently undergoing a major historic renovation. This welcome capital investment, guided by a vision which clearly sees the possibilities of harmoniously bringing our oldest and most venerated structures up to the technological standards demanded by 21st-Century occupants without a sacrifice to their original aesthetics, lends hope that this property, as well as the civic organization that once worked so hard to preserve it for future generations, will both last for at least another 60 years. Ellsworth's clock will, no doubt, look on and faithfully mark the passage of this time.

March 2022
Diccon Ong
Vice President
Hudson Heritage Association