

A Glance at the Bixler Legacy

At Eighth and Main there are, as of this writing, two mansions for sale, side by side, 802 and 804 Main St. Together with the corner house, once known as "Dr. Shull's," these three handsome buildings are well-known examples of Stroudsburg's residential architecture and are included in the Jacob Stroud Corporation's Historic Stroudsburg walking tour. The brochure says they "testify to Main Street Stroudsburg's prominence at the beginning of the 20th century." In the Monroe County Historical Association photo reproduced here, from the early 1900s, they look almost the same as they do today.

The middle house of the three, 802 Main St., is a piece of Stroudsburg history in its own right and also because of its connection with one of Stroudsburg's longest-standing businesses. Although built in 1902, in the mixture of styles known as Eclectic, with Colonial and Tudor Revival elements jostling other features, it has long been known as the Bixler House, after the family living



Ramblings

Christine Whitemore

there since 1923.

Robert Bixler Sr.'s family origins can be traced in the Bixler family book in the Stroud Mansion library. Peter Pickler/Pixseler/Pinckslear emigrated from Switzerland's Bern canton in 1727, sailing on the ship Friendship from Rotterdam via Cowes in England to Philadelphia, and settled first in Lancaster, then in Berks County. His descendant Robert, born in 1891, worked in Philadelphia for the Pennsylvania Railroad as a young man, but came for summer vacations to the Glenwood Hotel in Delaware Water Gap. This is

where he met his future wife, Hazel Josephine Albert.

In her "Personal Recollections" Hazel tells of her background. A child of this area's flourishing 19th century resort business, she was born prematurely in Room 5 of the Delaware Water Gap's Glenwood Hotel in 1894. Her mother was a sister of Peter Johnson, who ran the hotel. Another brother, John Johnson, ran the Portland House, where Hazel's father Edwin Samuel Albert worked, before running the Belfast Hotel for a few years,

and then joining his brother-in-law, Peter, at the Glenwood. He moved his family to Delaware Water Gap in 1902; Hazel went to the Delaware Water Gap School and later took the trolley to Stroudsburg High School (on Thomas Street, where Ramsey Elementary is now), graduating in 1914. She became "a leader of the young social set of Delaware Water Gap," and also of war work, according to *The Record's* account of her wedding.

This wedding to Robert Bixler took place in 1920, but her recollections, alas, give no details of their courtship during his summers at the Glenwood.



The 800 block of Main Street, Stroudsburg in the Early 20th century.

Photo courtesy Monroe County Historical Association

They lived with his relatives in Philadelphia until, in 1922, he resigned his job with the Pennsylvania Railroad, and they came back to Hazel's home ground. He bought the hardware store with the help of his father-in-law, and, with Hazel, her parents and her uncle

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Peter Johnson, decided to move from Delaware Water Gap to Stroudsburg. They chose 802 Main Street over two other (unknown) Stroudsburg properties by unanimous sealed vote, bought it in March 1923, and 10 months later, Robert Allen Bixler Jr. was born in the hospital on Sarah Street.

The store flourished; in *The Record* of June 27, 1933, readers found a profile of Robert Bixler Sr., business leader, and his shop: "Extensive decorations and remodeling have made the Bixler Store one of the most modern and attractive in the entire community. It has three floors of plate glass display windows.

The stock includes the entire hardware line, Duco products, Majestic, Atwater-Kent and Stromberg-Carlson radios, and sporting goods."

Robert Junior, the only child, married in 1950; he and his wife Felma raised three children at 802 Main St. One of

them, John Bixler, remembers growing up there and the chicken coop behind the house next door, where chickens and eggs were sold while he was a small child. He recalls Christmases when his mother had a whole birch tree, more than 20 feet high and one year 30 feet, brought into town from her family's Cherry Valley farm; she would spray it gold and set it up in the central stairwell, where, decorated with green and red baubles and lit with green and red spotlights, it reached to the third story. He remembers summers, when screens were slid into special tracks in the porch roof (still there today) to create a screened-in fresh air room.

The huge old house, on a busier Main Street and increasingly expensive to heat, finally left the family in 1986, when it was sold to the late attorney Robert Rosenblum. He converted it into legal offices, but retained original features, like the wainscoting, some in carved wood and some in amazingly ornate pressed leather.

Robert Bixler Jr. also relinquished the family hardware store. In a *Pocono Record* article (Wednesday, Oct. 2, 1985), Mark Wigfield noted that there had been a hardware store at 633 Main St. since at least 1911, when Miller's offered a complete line, according to their advertisement, of hardware, harness, trunks, grips, skates, guns and ammunition. The store became Hoffman and McDonough, then Albert and Bixler's, and then remained Bixler's for more than 60 years.

At last it was up for sale; Wigfield wrote that neighboring First Eastern Bank had hoped "to buy and demolish the building for parking and a drive-up window ... But Bixler's price was too high."

So the old hardware store building still stands, having housed an art gallery and now a music shop. If you position yourself right under the Main Street Juke Box sign, and look upwards, you can just see the words "Bixler Hardware" still there, engraved in the glass transom window. Which is fit

ting, for as John Bixler says: "Our family was never much for changing things."