

Photo of the Month

John Myler



John Myler, c.1950
brick and stonemason and building contractor
Rogers, Arkansas
Neg. # N005520

“We are very fortunate here in Rogers,” as James Hales commented in Rogers, Arkansas, 1881-2006, “to have such a fascinating history with most of the old buildings preserved . . . It is mind-boggling to think that most of these interesting buildings, with various complicated architectural designs, were built when Rogers had only dirt streets, wooden sidewalks, no sewers or indoor plumbing, no water system, no street lights, no phones, no concrete, and no heavy equipment other than horses and wagons.” In less

than six years from its founding in 1881, Rogers had three churches, with another under construction, the Rogers Academy, mills, business houses, and many new homes. By the mid-1890s most of the simple false-front stores that lined First and Walnut Streets were being replaced with substantial stone and brick commercial blocks.

One contractor in particular stands out as a leader in the construction field during this period. John Byron Myler (1879-1970) arrived in Rogers at the age of 16 with his step-father C.R. Crowe in 1895. The family, experienced in brick and stonemasonry, was originally from San Antonio, Texas, but saw great opportunity for builders in Rogers as the new town took shape. Crowe convinced merchants that stone and brick buildings were superior to frame structures in appearance and longevity, but not much more expensive to construct.

Crowe and Myler soon started to work on the first brick commercial building at First and Elm Streets known as the Burnham Block. Crowe went on to build six more buildings over the following four years, but moved to Joplin for another building boom. Even though most of the downtown commercial buildings had been completed by the early 1900s, Myler decided to stay in Rogers.

Building opportunities still abound and he found personal reasons to stay. When the family first moved to Rogers, Myler met his future wife, Effie Camden. Effie was born on May 10, 1881—the same day the first Frisco train arrived and the town was founded. The couple not only helped build Rogers, they also grew up with it. By 1950, every building with stone trim had been built by some member of the Crowe-Myler family. Stone trim was their trade mark and they believed that no building was complete without it.

Working on his own in 1899, Myler earned approximately 30 cents per hour and worked 10 hour days. Most of the early building was done with less formal plans than might be expected today. Typically, Myler would determine the number and size of rooms needed by the owner and make a basic sketch to work from. Many embellishments would be added as construction proceeded, and, in some cases, as an afterthought. This, however, changed in the early 1900s with the arrival of architect A.O. Clarke.

Many of the building materials Myler used during the early years were produced locally. Bricks were made at job sites or at brickyards such as Barnett's kiln on North Second Street and the yard located at the present site of the Tyson plant. Stone and lime was quarried in the bluffs east of town where Lake Atalanta now exists. Sand for mortar came from the White River and lumber could be milled from local stands of timber.

Cement was unavailable during these early years, so mortar was made from a mixture of sand and lime. Myler eventually worked a great deal with cement and laid the first curbs and sidewalks in town. He was proud of the longevity of the family's work, but freely admitted that some of their early buildings had to be reworked to replace the sand and lime mortar with more stable concrete. Regardless, none of their work was torn down due to deterioration.

By the 1950s, Myler had helped build nearly all of the brick and stone buildings in the business district, an uncounted number of homes, three churches, the first street curbs and concrete sidewalks on West Walnut Street, as well as served as foreman in building the city's first sewer system. In looking back, Myler reported that his favorite project was the Progressive Life building designed by A.O. Clarke in 1911 and located at Second and Elm Streets. In fact A.O. Clarke used Myler as a stonemason and contractor on many of his projects.

Many of the structures that Myler built or supervised construction of are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. His son, John E. Myler, joined the family business and served Rogers as a bricklayer for over 50 years. When we see the many stately brick and stone structures that line our streets today, we should remember the skills and contributions of the Myler family.