

The Union Block / 1-3 East Main Street
By Douglas H. Shepard, 2012

Howard Brothers

Edward **Howard** became a partner in a clothing mill in Fredonia in 1825. His family included sons Lewis S. (b.1836), Edward D. (1842), Frank W. (1844), and Clarence M. (1848).

Lewis worked as an assistant to the Post Master in 1851. By 1853 he was in charge of the office which also sold newspapers, magazines and other small items. In 1860 he was Deputy Post Master and had taken Edward in to clerk in the Book and Stationery Department. In March 1865 he was offering jewelry items including a fancy watch and in September 1866 Lewis and Edward advertised they had five different kinds of American Watches for sale. In 1867 Edward became a full partner with Lewis.

Censor

The *Censor* had been owned by several people after Henry **Frisbee** sold it in 1838. In 1842 it was bought by Willard **McKinstry** and Levi L. **Pratt**. The paper had several offices until 1862 when it moved to *4 Center Street*. In 1863 the Post Office and its “bookstore” was moved there as well.

In February 1868 W. **McKinstry** & Son (Louis) and L. S. **Howard** & Bros. bought the old **Taylor & Jennings** store lot at today’s 1 East Main Street (formerly the Putnam store). At the same time, Orson **Stiles** bought the lot next east of it. The old wooden stores that had been on the lots were sold to L. B. **Greene** and were to be moved to his lot further east on Main Street. However, on 29 April 1868 they were destroyed by fire.

Combined

It is not clear that it had been planned ahead of time, or if the fire changed their plans, but **Stiles**, the **McKinstrys** and the **Howards** did combine and built a single building designed by Enoch A. **Curtis** and called the Union Block (*1-3 East Main*). It was being built in 1868 and had its grand opening in March 1869. It was a stone building with brick facing, the brickwork done by Stephen **Johnson**. It was three stories high, about 50 feet wide on Main Street running back about 55 feet. A notable feature was the curved corner at Main Street and Water Street. On the first floor the **Howards** had the Water Street corner for their Jewelry/Bookstore/Post Office. **Stiles’** “Union Banking Company and Chautauqua County Savings Bank” occupied the east half of the first floor. The *Censor’s* offices were on the second floor above **Howards**, E. A. **Curtis** had an office over the front half of the bank, and at the rear was a barber shop. The entire third floor housed **Ladd & Pringle’s** photography studio.

In September 1875 Edward and Clarence formed the Independent Watch Co., then the Lake Shore Watch Co., and the Empire Watch Co., all based at 63 Main Street (today’s *1 East Main Street*). Frank took over a bakery/grocery at 7 Water Street. In 1876 Edward and Clarence bought the **Pettit** Eye Salve business and in 1878 sold the book and jewelry store to Frank. In December 1885 Edward and Clarence had moved their watch business to Peoria IL. At the same time Frank advertised what he called “The Empire Watch Co., 63 Main St., Fredonia N.Y.” authorizing all Express Agents to take orders for his watches. In the *Chicago Sunday Tribune* of 16 June 1907 there was an article quoting Richard W. **Sears** “that if a watch firm at Fredonia N.Y., years ago hadn’t sent him a watch, C.O.D., with privilege of return if he thought he couldn’t sell it, he might still be [a] dealer in coal, wood, and lumber in northern Minnesota.”

Since it was in 1886 that the incident occurred , it must have been Frank **Howard's** 63 Main St. business that inspired **Sears**, not the Fredonia Watch Co. of Edward and Clarence.

The Union Block was taken down and replaced by the current bank building in 1929.