BENNETT BEACH DRUG STORES
By Donald J. Mabry

R. Walter and Nellie Bennett. Photo courtesy of Walter L. Bennett

The Bennett brothers, Richard Walter and Reppard Robert, pharmacists from Georgia, migrated to Jacksonville to establish drug stores.1 R. Walter, the older, paved the way to Jacksonville and then to Jacksonville Beach, where they spent the last years of their lives. Reppard created Bennett Drug Stores, Inc. which owned drug stores in Ocala, Gainesville, and Tallahassee and three in Jacksonville Beach. Their stories are different but intertwined. Since R. Walter is the older, he gets to go first but first a reminder of what drug stores were before the big chains such as CVS, Walgreens, and Rite-Aid.

Small, independent drug stores were once ubiquitous in the United States, serving both as part of the medical system by selling prescription drugs, patent medicines, and ointments; often, the pharmacist knew more about prescriptions that the prescribing physician. After all, it was the pharmacist’s job to keep track of what the various drugs did. Prescription and patent drugs were only a part of the business, however. Most stores sold ointments, dental supplies and other
health-related merchandise as well as toiletries, notions, sundries, and magazines. The owner was a merchant and sometimes a pharmacist.

Beginning in the 1890s, the soda fountain enticed customers inside with its carbonated drinks such as Coca-Cola. In Georgia, the Coca-Cola Company subsidized some soda fountains. The soda fountain often was a lunch counter, serving light fare and giving people a chance to socialize. Unlike contemporary chain drug stores, there was little standardization in layout, merchandise, or building style.

The pharmacist dispensed prescription drugs, some of which he compounded in the store, and selected the non-prescription drugs he also sold. The pharmacist either had to tend to the other business of the store or find someone to do it. He or she (it was almost always a he until the last quarter of the 20th century) was honored and trusted by the community and often called “Doc.” At the beginning of the 20th century in Georgia and Florida, a college education was not a prerequisite for a pharmaceutical license. A high school diploma, an apprenticeship, and two short courses were all that was necessary. Some pharmacists from Georgia did attend college; some graduated.  

Family-owned drug stores were many and competitive; the Rexall Drugs designation gave those who had it an advantage. Rexall Drugs was created by a patent medicine salesman, Louis Kroh Liggett, in 1902. He had been selling bottled tonic called “Vinol” since 1898 with great success by giving local and national advertising to select drug stores. He and his investors launched the United Drug Company, choosing the catchy brand name “Rexall.” United began manufacturing proprietary medicines and then other drug store products which had a money-back guarantee. United aggressively marketed its Rexall brand products through its supply chain of drug stores owned by someone else. Its strengths included quality products and clever merchandising such as the One Cent sale “(two items for the price of one, plus 1 cent)” and other techniques to keep customers coming into the store. What Liggett did was create a known brand setting Rexall Drug stores apart from the crowd. No matter where one went in the United States, the chance of finding a familiar products was very high. The label enabled small businesses to have to be distinctive.  

R. Walter was the first brother to leave their native Georgia and move to Jacksonville, a hundred miles south of Jesup, Georgia where he was born on May 2, 1876. R. Walter received his education there and then learned the pharmacist trade. On January 6, 1897 at age 20, he married Nellie E. Jones of Burke County, Georgia and moved her to Jacksonville, Florida where he worked in a pharmacy. We know that, in 1899, when his son Walter Lafayette Bennett
was born on October 21, he was clerking for E. M. Delgado at the Riverside Pharmacy, 465 Riverside Avenue and living at 815 May Street, one block west of Riverside Avenue.4

Commonly, people served an apprenticeship before receiving a license. Another way to obtain a Florida license was by reciprocity with another state. Numerous people obtained a Georgia license, which was relatively easy to get and used it to get licensed in their home state.5 R. Walter obtained his pharmaceutical license (#959) from the State of Florida issued R. Walter pharmacist license on March 22, 1901. In December 1902, he used his Florida license to obtain a Georgia license. The cost was $15 which is more than $350 in 2014 terms.6

R. Walter went from clerk to druggist to manager to owner in very few years. In 1904, he was Manager of the Hefley Drug Company at 401 W. Bay Street, that is, downtown. The next year, he was in business for himself. The Jacksonville City Directory shows over thirty drug stores in Jacksonville including R. Walter Bennett as the druggist at 528 Main Street and R. W. Bennett & Company at 829 W. Ashley St. Main & Ashley Streets.7 He would have a drug store at Main & Ashley Streets for years. On April 25, 1910, Reppard sold him the contents of the drug store at 411 Forest Street (at the corner of South Myrtle Street) for one thousand dollars ($1,000). These included “all drugs, chemicals, toiletry items, and equity in fixtures, soda fountain, and all other furnishings and merchandise contained within” Reppard’s drug store. Presumably, R. Walter used them in his Main Street store.8
Life was good for the R. Walter Bennett family. They prospered and could afford to send their son, Lafayette as he preferred to be called, to Duval High School, the only high school for whites in the county. Nationally, only 14.5% of persons 17 years old graduated from high school in 1917.

Duval High School Source: Whiteway Corner (tinyurl.com/odg62nu)
1917 Duval High School Oracle  Source: Whiteway Corner (tinyurl.com/odg62nu)

Reppard, born March 22, 1884 in Jesup, moved to Jacksonville by 1905, the year he first appears in the Jacksonville city directory. He clerked for his older brother’s R. W. Bennett & Company at 528 Main Street and lived with his older brother and family at 218 Ashley. By 1907, he lived at 1516 Elder Street in Jacksonville. His Florida pharmaceutical license was #960, registered June 11, 1907, issued in reciprocity with Alabama. In 1917, Reppard owned a drug store at 411 Forest Street and was manufacturing [compounding drugs] at 401 Forest in Riverside. He and his wife Allie Fryer Bennett (married December 17, 1915) lived at the corner of Riverside Avenue and Cherry Street.

R. Walter, his son Lafayette, and brother Reppard registered for the military draft in 1918 when the United States entered World War One. The father was 42 and Reppard 34, both very unlikely to be taken into the army.

Source: familysearch.org
Lafayette, a student at the University of Florida where he was a member of Alpha Tau Omega fraternity, enlisted on October 15, 1918 in the Army Reserve. By the time he graduated in 1921, the war had long been over. He would serve on active duty in World War II, going into the United States Naval Reserve on August 5th 1943 and serving as a Pharmacist Mate Second Class until his discharge on September 13, 1946.

By 1921, R. Walter traveled to Pablo Beach, probably by the Florida East Coast Railway to help out in Sharp’s Drug Store (also called Pablo Pharmacy) in
addition to his Main Street store. The population of greater Pablo Beach (including Neptune Beach) in 1920 was only 442 persons. There were less than 100 people in Atlantic Beach and fewer than that in Palm Valley and Mineral City (now Ponte Vedra Beach). Mayport had 399 people. In total, there were about a thousand residents. Of course, the population swelled between April and September when tourists, mostly day trippers from Jacksonville, rode the Florida East Coast Railway or drove an automobile on Atlantic Boulevard to reach Atlantic Beach and points south. R. Walter probably helped a day a week, mostly in the season.

By 1925, the brothers were well established, each in his own section of the city. R. Walter’s business name, “Bennett Drug Company,” was headquartered at 1951 Main Street. Reppard owned stores at 631 Riverside Avenue and 3507 St. Johns Avenue.

Reppard incorporated in 1929 under the name Bennett Drugs, Inc. He has 348 shares, his wife Allie one share, and C. R. Goodrich one share. His older brother was not a shareholder. In the 1930 federal census Reppard (46) lived
with his wife Allie (39), daughter Carolyne (5) and mother-in-law Mary Fryer (58). Reppard (51), his wife Allie (48), and daughters Carolyn (10) and Barbra (5) lived at 1512 Mallory in Jacksonville in 1935. A decade later, Allie’s 74 year old mother, Mary Fryer, lived with them as well as their son-in-law Herbert Langenfeld, his wife Caroyn, and their daughter Karen. The young couple had married June 17, 1942.

R. Walter and family moved to Valdosta, Georgia in 1929 where he bought and operated the store owned by John Ingram and F. H. Ramsey, a Rexall Drug Store!12 As the Miller’s Valdosta City Directory, 1930-31 says:

Bennett’s Drug Store owned by R. Walter Bennett. “The Rexall Drug Store, prescription druggist, everything carried in a drug store,” located at 101 S. Patterson. Telephone numbers 3 and 4.13 R. Walter, his wife Nellie, and his son Lafayette lived at 406 East Hill Avenue or 511 West Hill Ave, Telephone 899-J.

Lafayette, who obtained a Florida pharmacist license June 6, 1931, was Assistant Manager of the store. The father was obviously training his son in the family business. Also working there as an employee was Rosalind F. Bennett, wife of Lafayette. They lived at 106 South Ashley. R. Walter advertised the presence of prescription druggists and a fountain luncheonette, using the slogan “Cut Prices Every Day.”

By 1937, Lafayette was manager of the store and living in the Daniel Ashley Hotel with his wife Rosalind. The 1940 U.S. Census listed this 26 year old woman as a “dietician” in the store; presumably, she was in charge of the lunch counter. By now, the Bennetts were advertising free delivery and “Prescriptions Carefully Prepared, Drugs, Soda Fountain, Luncheonette, “Cara Nome” Cosmetics, Pharmaceuticals, Fountain Pens, Candies. Kodaks, Films, Stationery.”14 The elder Bennetts had integrated themselves into the community Nellie Bennett was a regent of the General James Jackson Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution for 1936-38.


R. A. Sterling’s Valdosta Georgia City Directory, 1940  Courtesy of Walter L. Bennett

Life for the R. Walter Bennett family changed after 1940. R. Walter moved to 613 South First Street, Jacksonville (formerly Pablo) Beach in 1941; he would remain there for the rest of his life. Lafayette’s marriage to Rosalind ended and
he married Wynelle Burgsteiner, a woman twenty years his junior, in Green Cove Springs, Florida on October 1, 1942. Lafayette was stationed at the Naval Hospital in Lake City when his daughter Carole was born in 1943. He served in the Navy for three years during which time their son Walter Lee was born on October 29, 1945. Although R. Walter was 65 years old when he moved to Jacksonville Beach, he kept a hand in at the Bennett’s Drug Store on 234 North First Street. Then Nellie died at their married daughter’s home in Atlanta, Georgia on October 17, 1948. Lafayette who had moved his family to Avon Park in south central Florida and then to Fort Pierce on the Atlantic coast. He died on October 16, 1949 as the result of automobile accident.

The Bennett Drug Store at 234 North First Street (at the corner with Second Avenue) was in an excellent location in the 1940 and 1950’s because it was on a busy main street with lots of foot traffic as people walked to frequent its shops, bars, and restaurants or to go to and from the rides of Griffen Amusement Park or the coin-operated machines in Playland Arcade or to other establishments on the Boardwalk, including the pier which had fishing and dancing. Those who sunbathed or immersed themselves in the Atlantic found plenty of beach supplies in addition to the usual merchandise of drug stores.
R. Walter Bennett in front of 234 N. First Street about 1941. Courtesy of Walter L. Bennett

He and Nellie lived at 613 South First Street, a house on the ocean.

Courtesy of Walter L. Bennett

In this snapshot of storm damage, the Bennett home is on the right, a house called Sun Tan Village on the left
After Nellie died in 1948, he added a bathroom adjoining the north end bedroom to make private quarters for himself and came and went through a private entrance. There were no kitchen facilities so he could take his meals at one of his stores. The rest of the house was rented, thus giving him additional income and ensuring that there were people on the premises.
Betty June Dorough, 1952, working at the 234 N. First Street lunch counter and soda fountain. Photo courtesy of Robert Dorough

By 1951, the corporation had expanded to 119 Pablo Avenue even though Stewart Brothers Pharmacy was on the corner of Pablo Avenue and North First Street.
Stewart Brothers Pharmacy on the right
Announcing the Opening of...

THE NEW

BENNETT'S DRUGS

119 Pablo Avenue   PHONE 5-4126   Jacksonville Beach

PRESCRIPTIONS
Accurately Compounded
Subject to Night Calls

W. F. RHODES
CURTIS A. DUKE
Reg. Pharmacists

SPECIALIZING IN...

COSMETICS... by
Elizabeth Arden—Dorothy Gray—Yard-
lies—Helena Rubinstein Dupary—Cor-
day—Coly—Prince Matchabelli and
other leading brands.

MRS. LURA CROSSLEY
In Charge
Assisted by
MRS. LEON SHEARER

PHOTOGRAPHIC SUPPLIES
Complete Supply By
EASTMAN—BELL & HOWARD
ANSCO—REVERE

—MOVIE EQUIPMENT
and TAPE RECORDERS
—FILM DEVELOPING
—ASSISTANCE TO AMATEURS

W. F. (Bill) Rhodes
Manager

LUNCHEONETTE
In Connection Serving
Breakfast—Lunch
A La Carte—Pizza Luncheon
Sandwiches

MRS. DELIA (Tony) ANTHONY
in Charge

MRS. LURA CROSSLEY
Cosmetician

—STATIONERY
—BOXED CANDIES

By Hollingsworth and Whitman

CURTIS H. DUKE
Pharmacist

—SUNDRIES
—SICK ROOM SUPPLIES
—BABY NEEDS

—OPEN DAILY FROM 8 A.M. TO 11 P.M.—

Bennett's Drug Store, 119 Pablo Avenue Source: Ocean Beach Reporter
The Zapf Building housing Bennett’s at 119 Pablo Avenue
Source: Beaches Museum
Reppard was 70 in 1954 and his corporation owned two drug stores in Jacksonville Beach and one each in Tallahassee, the state capitol, Gainesville, and Ocala.

Bennett’s Drug Store, Ocala  Bennett’s Drug Store | Snapshots from the Past  http://snapshots.blogs.ocala.com/11549/ bennetts-drug-store  Mike Hammer Collection
According to the 1954 beaches directory, the Bennett Drug Company corporate officers were Reppard Bennett, president, Carroll C. Miller, secretary-treasurer, and H. M. Steinmeyer, assistant secretary-treasurer. Reppard and his second wife, Jewel, had moved to Jacksonville Beach, living on North Fifth Avenue. Two years later, he was living on Penman Road.

When the Colonial Shopping Center opened in 1955 on the western side of North Third Street between 16th and 17th Avenues in, Bennett Drugs was there with a drug store. More dwellings were being constructed in northern Jacksonville Beach and the southern half of Neptune Beach creating a demand for more businesses. Its proximity to Duncan U. Fletcher Junior-Senior High School made it a favorite with students. Years afterwards when the store was long gone, the memory of drinking cherry Cokes there remains.
At The Beach

WHATEVER YOUR NEEDS
IT’S
BENNETT’S
DRUG STORES

TUSSY SPECIAL
2 Perma-Stick
LIPSTICKS
1/2 Price $1.10

DURABRY
CLEANSING CREAM
4 oz $1.00

WILDFROOT
CREME OIL
(REG. 60c.)
1/2 Price 33c

Wildroot
CREME OIL
1/2 Price
(REG. 60c. Tube)
Now Only 33c

WOODBURY'S
After Shave
Men’s Deodorant
Both
for 69c

VITALIS
HAIR TONIC
(REG. 25c. Vials)
2 for 43c

HEADACHE?
BAYER

“Wherever you go, wherever you drive
...DRIVE CAREFULLY!
...It's a PLEASURE having you around.”

3 BENNETT
DRUG STORES
TO SERVE YOU

• 234 North 1st St. Phone CH 9-5694
• 119 Pahle Ave. Phone CH 9-4126
• 1716 North 3rd St. Phone CH 9-2874

Source: Ocean Beach Reporter
R. Walter died on January 8, 1957 of prostate cancer. He was 80 years old. Reppard died March 11, 1966. The brothers were gone but Russell R. Boatright, Reppard’s grandson through Carolyn, was President of Bennett Drugs, Inc. It was dissolved on June 27, 1977 but it had been shrinking for years. In the 1960 Polk City Directory for the beaches, Berry Pharmacy occupied 234 N. First Street.

In 1964, the City of Jacksonville Beach began its renovation of downtown, razing the buildings in the first three blocks of Pablo Avenue. Bennett’s at 119 Pablo Avenue was one of these as was Stewart Brothers. By 1977, Stewart Brothers Pharmacy had moved to 234 First Street and then moved to 1716 North Third Street in the Colonial Shopping Center.
In the 21st century, the space contains Beachside Casuals. The drug stores or pharmacies at the Jacksonville Beach are part of nationwide chains with almost no local flavor. Bennett and his drug stores have not been forgotten,
however. They not only are remembered by former customers, but there are physical remnants. The Beaches Museum was using a display case from Bennett’s Drug Store. Beach Casuals has the name Stewart Brothers Drugs embedded on the floor at the entrance of 234 North First Street.

Photos by Don Mabry
The beach communities of Duval County changed dramatically over the years in many ways. Instead of being small towns distant from the city limits of Jacksonville, they became suburbs of the City of Jacksonville and then part of the City of Jacksonville itself. New and better amusement parks close to interstate highways captured tourist dollars while much of the Boardwalk fell into disrepair. Fires consumed several buildings as the pier between Second and Third Avenues North. The City of Jacksonville Beach redeveloped the land bordered by Beach Boulevard north to North First Avenue and the ocean west to North Third Street, hoping to attract more tourists by beautifying downtown. The businesses in that area, such as Bennett’s Drugs and Stewart Brothers Pharmacy on Pablo Avenue disappeared. Historic Pablo Avenue, the first street in the town, disappeared east of North Third Street.

Change came. Bars and restaurants still thrived because people ate and drank but they and the amusement places ceased to be the main sources of income for the beaches. The United States Navy expansion of its Mayport facility, brought more people and money. Vacant land disappeared to be replaced by homes, apartment houses, and stores. More and better roads in the beach cities and to and from the rest of Duval County made commuting easy. They became the eastern part of Jacksonville, even the settlement in northern
St. Johns County, although they wanted to see their communities as not part of the metropolis.

The beaches became a very attractive market to national chains. Many small businesses, such as family-owned drug stores, motels, and grocery stores disappeared, unable to compete with regional and national chains. Even before Wal-Mart established pharmacies inside its huge stores and supermarkets got into the prescription drug business, drug store chains such as CVS, Walgreens, and Rite-Aid outcompeted the independent stores. Mass marketing became the order of the day for so many businesses.

Acknowledgements

Walter L. Bennett, grandson of R. Walter Bennett, made this essay possible by gathering source materials from his family, government libraries and agencies in Florida and Georgia, and from the Beaches Museum. We are thankful to the Lowndes County [Georgia] Historical Society and Museum and the Valdosta Public Library.

Taryn Rodríguez-Boette, former archivist of the Beaches Museum, is a dedicated professional who was helpful to Walter and me in learning more about the Bennett drug stores. She knows so much about the history of the Jacksonville beaches.

The Beaches Museum and History Park has an excellent staff who enable people to enjoy beaches history.

Searches on Familysearch.org provided census data, birth certificates, draft records, and death notices.

The Jacksonville Public Library aids researchers with its collection of city directories, some online.

Robert Carr Dorrough contributed a picture of his sister working the soda fountain at the Bennett’s Drug Store at 234 North First Street.

APPENDIX: BENNETT BEACH DRUG STORES

In the 1950s, Bennett had three of the five drug stores in Jacksonville Beach. Bennett owned a store at 119 Pablo Avenue, another at 234 North First Street, and the third at 1716 North Third Street by 1956. The other two were Prather’s Drug store which became Stewart Brother’s Pharmacy and Adkins Pharmacy.
There were also a drug store each in Neptune Beach and Atlantic Beach. They were Langston’s Pharmacy owned by William R Langston, Sr. which became Silver’s Pharmacy on Atlantic Boulevard and First Street in Neptune Beach and McDermott’s Pharmacy which became Campbell’s Pharmacy on Atlantic Beach Boulevard and East Coast Drive in Atlantic Beach.

**Atlantic Beach**

![Atlantic Beach Drug Store](image)

which became
CAMPBELL'S PHARMACY

Prescriptions, "That's My Business"

Phone Cherry 9-9796

ATLANTIC BEACH, FLORIDA

PAULA AND ALBERT
CAMPBELL’S PHARMACY

Prescriptions, "That's My Business"

Phone Cherry 9-9796
Atlantic Beach, Florida

PAULA and JOHN
NEPTUNE BEACH

Langston’s Drug Store

became

Silver’s Drugs
JACKSONVILLE BEACH
Prather’s Pharmacy
Which, after remodeling, became Stewart Brothers Pharmacy
which moved to 234 North First Street
234 North First Street

And then moved to 1716 North Third Street, replacing Adkins Pharmacy

Bennett Drugs

234 North First Street
119 Pablo Avenue
1716 North Third Street which, in 1968, was replaced by Adkins Pharmacy

Adkins Pharmacy
524 North First Street
Richard Walter Bennett did not like his first name and signed as R. Walter Bennett. This essay will refer to him as R. Walter because he named his son Walter. Reppard used his middle initial.  

My father held a Georgia pharmacy license. For one year each, he attended Presbyterian College and Tulane University; then he studied at a pharmacy trade school in Atlanta,  

Frank Sternad, "History of Rexall - the short version."  

When Reppard, born in Jesup, Georgia in 1884, came to Jacksonville in 1907, he would settle near his brother in Riverside.
Robert Cumming Wilson, *Drugs and Pharmacy in the Life of Georgia, 1733-1959* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1959). Wilson was Dean of the School of Pharmacy at the University of Georgia. He remarks on page 141 that “The preceptorship-apprenticeship method of training pharmacists was for at least 100 years to be the accepted practice. But when pharmacists began to recognize the value of education in its broadest sense, this preceptor-apprentice method seemed to be unbreakable as a system, for it was not until 1933 that a college diploma became the legal requirement for license to practice pharmacy in Georgia.” My father held a Georgia license. He had attended Presbyterian College and Tulane University for one year each and then went to Atlanta to be trained as a pharmacist.

George F. Payne, Georgia State Board of Pharmacy, to R. Walter Bennett, December 23, 1902; Florida Druggists Registration.


From the 1910 notarized bill of sale.

Jacksonville had a Sharp’s Drug Store at 942 West Bay Street run by Ernest B. and Eugene A. Sharp. In all likelihood, the two drug stores were owned by the same people.

See I’ve Been Working on the Railroad (http://goo.gl/NPfZHw) for the history of this and its predecessor railroads.

The Jacksonville city directory of 1925 says that R. Walter was a Prescription Druggist at 1951 Main Street drug store, much farther north than Main and Ashley, while Reppard had three drug stores—411 Forest, 3507 St. Johns Avenue, and 631 Riverside Avenue but *The Pharmaceutical Era, Volume 56* (1923), page 197 says he sold the Forest Avenue Store to the Forest Drug Company and opened the Riverside avenue store. The telephone directory does not list a store at 411 Forest Street.


R. A. Sterling’s Valdosta Georgia City Directory, 1940.

Gladys was Mrs. E. L. Gunn, Jr. of Atlanta. Nellie Bennett had been sick for several weeks. Her funeral was held at the First Baptist Church in Jacksonville Beach on February 19, *Florida TimesUnion*, February 19, 1948.

It is possible that he threw in with his younger Reppard; the store was owned by Bennett Drugs, Inc.


On October 1, 1968, Duval County and Jacksonville merged but with a federal system. Baldwin in the western part of the county and Atlantic Beach Neptune Beach, and Jacksonville Beach were part of Jacksonville as much as any other part but also were allowed to maintain their own city governments. Just as a person was a citizen of Florida and of the United States, a Neptune Beach resident was a citizen of Neptune Beach and of Jacksonville-Duval County. Of course, jurisdictional boundary disputes could occur and the beach cities had to negotiate taxes with the larger entity.