

# FALL INTO ARTS FESTIVAL

## Step Back in Time: Kennett Courthouse Square & Beyond Historical Walking Tour

### Sexton Mule Barn - Established circa 1916 - 1930s

Kennett St., behind Cornerstone Drug, extending to E. 2nd St.

#### The Mule Trade in Kennett

This parking lot was once the site of a succession of buildings related to livestock, culminating with the Sexton Mule Barn, a hub for providing livestock for transportation, agriculture, and food.

Imagine that the year is 1916 and you are standing less than half a block from the center of Kennett's commercial district comprised of clothing stores, grocers, saloons, pharmacies, moving picture houses, and hotels. The city streets are unpaved, and as you walk around the square to shop, you experience the smell of animals, dirt, and more. You might believe that you have been transported from the city to the farm as you catch whiffs of the barnyard "fragrance."

The story begins with A.A. Sexton, who stood with his regiment at Jefferson Barracks on July 20, 1898, just three months after the start of the Spanish-American War. In the shadow of uncertainty, their commanding officer said, "As to when we leave here and where we will go, no one has the least idea, all being willing to go anywhere at any time." This spirit of willingness to embrace the unknown would characterize Sexton's life as he created a series of business ventures as one of Kennett's early entrepreneurs.

Fast forward to September 1905, when Sexton acquired a butchering and meat shop from W. F. Shelton, Jr. and Co., located on the south side of the square, one of his first commercial outlets.

**City Meat Market**  
A. A. SEXTON, Proprietor

I will kill only first class meat, dry fed and finished on my farm, where I have ample grain and hay--no soft, watery stuff will be sold.

**Your Patronage**

Invited at this, the finest, cleanest and best Meat Shop in Southeast Missouri.

South Side Square, KENNETT.

He later acquired an interest in the livery seen on the 1911 city map below, and by March 1911, Sexton's ambitions had led him and veterinarian J.P. Hampton to St. Louis, where they procured a carload of mules. Hampton's involvement in the livery barn continued to evolve, culminating in his purchase of Sexton's interest the following year.

Sexton and his former business partner Hampton appear to have had frequent dealings and in February 1914 Sexton bought the livery barn and lot back from him.

Advertisements from February 26, 1915, showcased Sexton's multifaceted offerings – from mules to milk cows and feed. In April of that year, Sexton had a concrete sidewalk installed on the side of his livery stable lot on Kennett Street, which the newspaper declared "an improvement that has long been needed."

On August 15, 1919, the Twice-a-Week Dunklin Democrat noted that "A.A. Sexton is erecting a mule barn on the lot across Second Street and south of the garage building. The barn will be 52'x80' in dimension and will be a most excellent structure for that purpose."

Three days later, it was noted that "The contract was let, Tuesday, by A.A. Sexton for the construction of a fine brick garage to be located on the present site of the horse and mule lot, on the corner, south of the Cotton Exchange Bank."

Sexton's health declined in 1934 and in March his son Glen announced that the grocery store he had operated was closing so that he could "devote his time to looking after his father's farming and other interests." Those interests had expanded to include a seed business and on May 18, 1934, there was an advertisement for a new location for seeds, "in front of sales barn, first door south Chevrolet garage across the street from the county jail."

The story of the mule trade in Kennett unfolds through the lens of A.A. Sexton, a soldier turned entrepreneur, who played a pivotal role in shaping the town's commerce during the early 20th century. From his acquisition of a butchering and meat shop to a livery and mule barn, Sexton's business acumen left an indelible mark. A.A. Sexton died in September 1934 and the mule barn is believed to have closed by the 1940s.

**MULES AND HORSES**

**FOR SALE**

I will have a carload of good mixed Mules and Horses at the Livery Stable in Kennett and will sell at prices you can afford. Don't miss this opportunity, as this may be the last load. Stock suitable for logging. Will trade or sell.

A. A. SEXTON

**Mules AND Horses**

I buy and sell Mules and Horses and have a lot on hand all the time for sale or trade. Will be glad to correspond or telephone with you.

A. A. SEXTON  
Phone 201, KENNETT, MO.

#### The Mule and Missouri

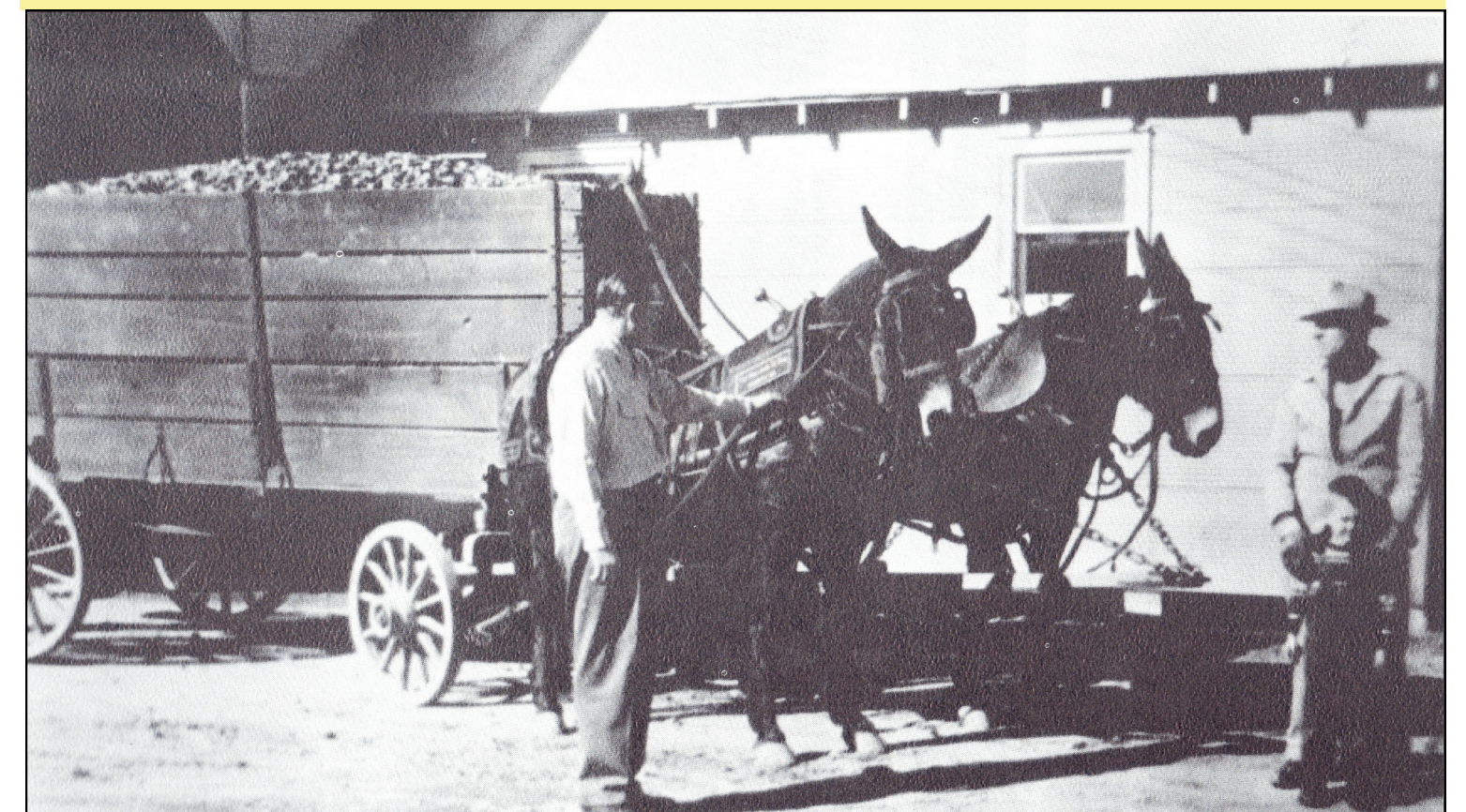
According to the University of Missouri's Mule Club, in Missouri "the mule is the embodiment of a living, breathing, kicking, connection with a rich cultural heritage, a bridge that spans centuries." Tradition states that in 1822 a resident of Howard County Missouri led the first trading party over the Santa Fe Trail and returned with a herd of Mexican mules and donkeys. Missouri breeders quickly saw the value of these hardy animals and by 1840 the mule industry flourished in Missouri.

At one time 45% of Missouri farmers were involved in the breeding of mules. With \$700 as the average farm income at the turn of the 20th century, mules offered farmers an opportunity for economic growth.

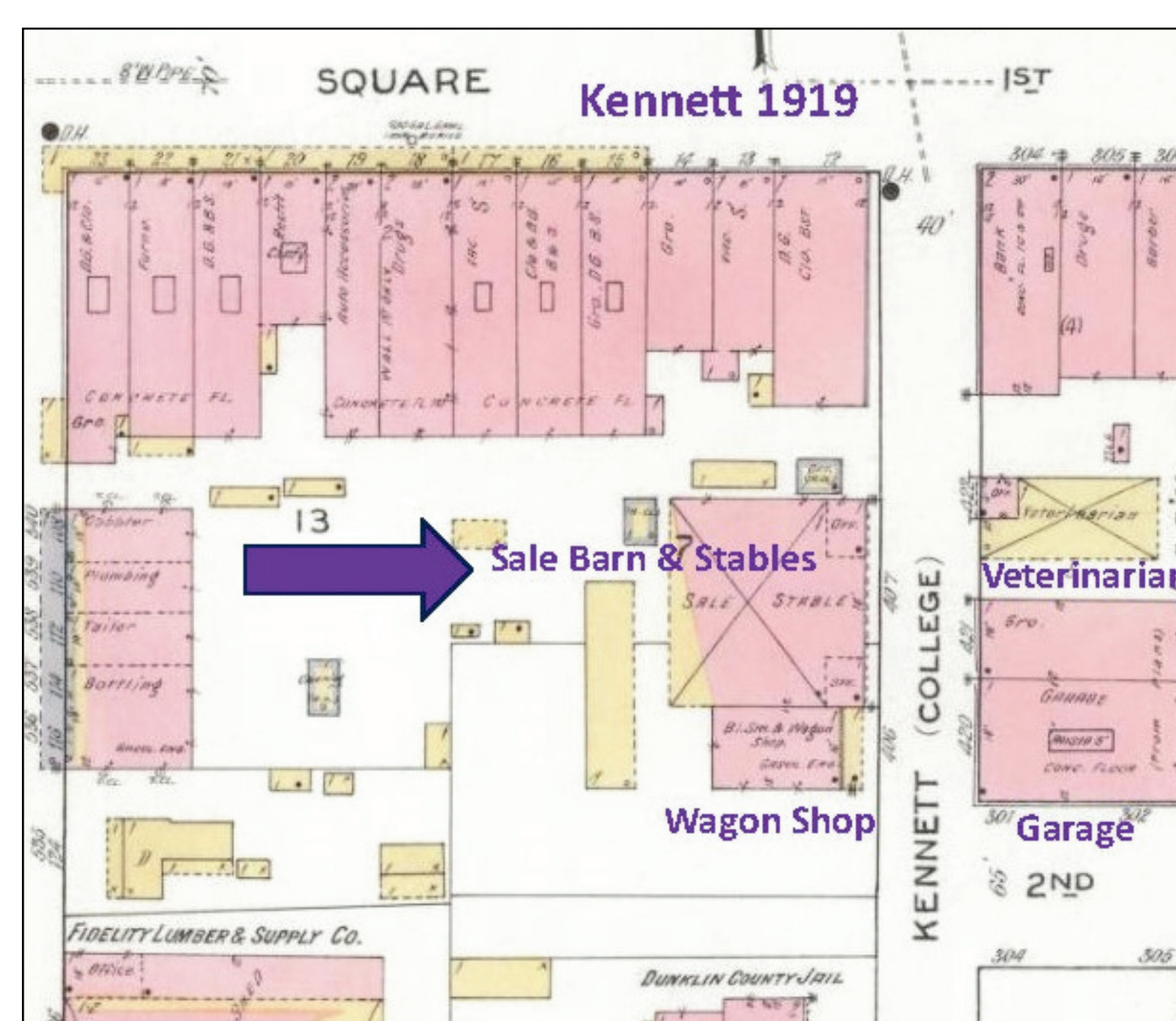
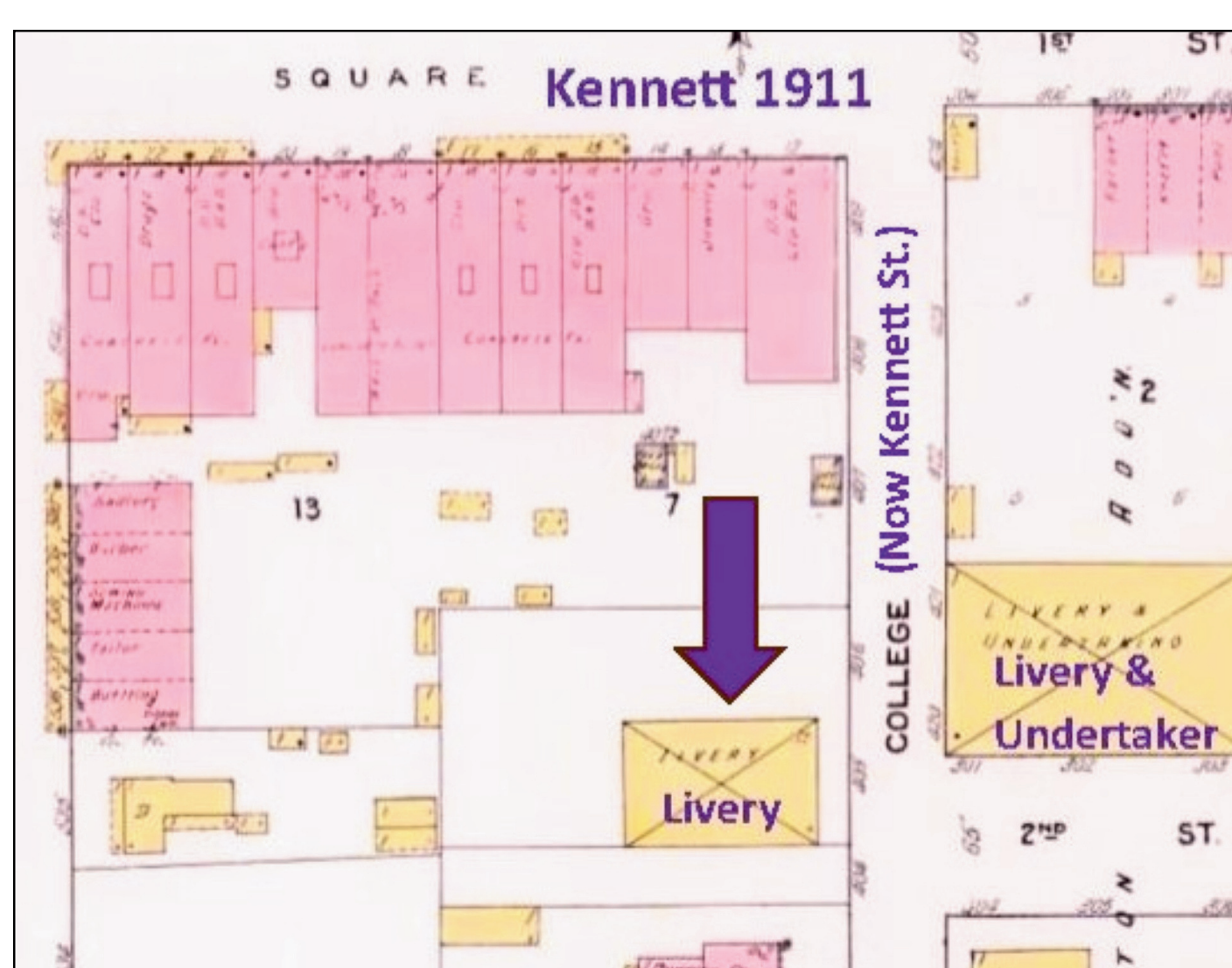
Of equal importance to the growth of the mule trade was the country's expanding cotton market. Glimpsing the potential value of their vigorous mules, Missourians promoted mule power not only to the Cotton Belt, but also to America's developing lead, coal, and logging industries. In 1870, Missouri was the largest mule-holding state in the United States, a title which was held until 1900.

As the foundation for transporting the nation's commerce, Missouri mule production gained a reputation for quality. The term "Missouri Mule" was probably used in casual conversation in the later years of the 19th century, but it became famous in 1904 when a six-mule hitch belonging to W.A. Elgin of Platte County, Missouri swept all competition in the St. Louis Exposition.

"Missouri Mule History & Facts," University of Missouri College of Veterinary Medicine, Mule Club.



A. A. Sexton's son Earl at the family business.



These maps show the changes in Sexton's business locations in the period between 1911 and 1919. In 2023 "The Sexton Building" still stands on the East side of Kennett St. and houses a photography studio.

#### Seed of All Kinds

We are now in our new home and invite our many patrons to visit our store, where you will find the most complete line of bulk garden and field seeds in Southeast Missouri.

You will also find our prices right on SUDAN, KAFFIR CORN, CANE in fact any kind of seed for the farm, garden or lawn.

**STOCK PEAS SPECIAL**

**While they last, \$2.00 bushel**

Seed and Feed Corn Hay and Other Feeds

**A. A. SEXTON**

New location in front of sales barn first door south Chevrolet Garage, across street from County Jail.

Sources: Delta Democrat, Library of Congress (Sanborn maps).

Special thanks to Libby Mobley and the Dunklin County Genealogical Society.

