The first major industry to be established in Adair County was in 1907. During this year, the Kirksville Business Men's League received an inquiry from the Friedman-Shelby Shoe Company, and a representative committee was sent immediately to the company headquarters in St. Louis. There they learned that the company would only build under certain conditions, which required that the city furnish a free site, free water for five years, and a $60,000 cash bonus. In return, the company proposed to construct a 60 x 300 foot four-story building and employ 300 workers producing 1,800 shoes a day. Employment would eventually be increased to 600 people producing up to 4,000 pairs of shoes daily.

An outcry went up among the citizens of Kirksville. They said that $60,000 could never be raised because the conditions were unreasonable. But a small group of men realized, as was stated in a 1908 Daily Express, that the factory "marked the dawn of a new era of industrial development in this good town." These men bought an area of land in the southwest part of Kirksville, and divided it into 380 lots for $200 a lot, making an approximate total of $76,000. By doing this, they secured the cash bonus and also the land.

The next evening, after the contract had been signed, there was a large celebration which included a bonfire on the square, the blowing of all steam whistles throughout the town, the shooting of fireworks, and the performance of a band.

The building was then constructed as planned. The construction of the building was very unique and interesting in that the exterior was constructed entirely of brick, but all of the building supports were constructed of solid wood beams instead of the steel beams of modern buildings. It also generated its own power by an enormous steam-operated generator located in a concrete building beside the factory. Coal shipped in by train was used to operate this generator. The factory whistle could be heard from all over town. The citizens relied on the whistle as a means of waking in the morning, and making it home in time for dinner.

On opening day in May of 1908, the shoe factory had a force of only 35 workers. The officers of the company were: A. Friedman, president; W. H. Shelby, vice-president; Lester Friedman, secretary; and A. I. Stix, treasurer. Within six months, 300 people were employed producing 1,800 to 2,000 pairs of shoes daily.

The company produced men's and boy's shoes that were said to be well made and medium priced. Many styles of shoes

*Drawing below: The Friedman-Shelby Shoe Factory seen as it was when it opened in 1908.*
were made by the factory as years passed. Style trends continued to wield an important influence on shoe sales in all categories and price ranges. Flexibility, softness, lightness, and slim lines exerted the strongest influence on shoe styles. During World War II, however, all casual shoe production ceased and army boots were produced. After this, the slim "Continental" look continued to be most popular for men. Lighter construction and special techniques were used to achieve the desired flexibility and softness in the various styles, which included plain and moccasin toe oxfords, slippers, and the classic wing tip.

Although all shipments in and out of Kirksville were by truck, the plant used products from other countries. Leather was brought in from as far away as France, Germany, and India. Through the company's distribution system, the finished shoes were eventually sold not only in the United States and the North American continent, but also overseas, including Japan and Africa.

The Friedman-Shelby Shoe Company had succeeded the Friedman Brothers Shoe Company in St. Louis in January of 1907. At this time, it produced the Friedman-Shelby line of shoes. It was next owned by the International Shoe Company, who bought the Kirksville factory in 1916. They produced the Peters, Robert, and Johnson & Read brands of shoes. It was last owned by the Florsheim Shoe Company, producing the Florsheim line of shoes.

The "old shoe factory" was last operational in 1973. In July of that year, production was moved to a newly built factory located on the south side of Kirksville. The old building was then purchased by Baldwin, Inc. and is now used as a warehouse for Baldwin's distribution of supplies.