

First National Bank

FROM THE HUNTINGTON COUNTY HISTORY AND EDUCATION CENTER

When a small-town bank made a big-time decision

*** *Fourth in a series***

This episode continues our series about the 19-foot-wide, 8-foot-tall mural painted by Robert Fettinger in 2006 on one of the History Center's interior walls, that depicts some of the enterprises on North Jefferson Street downtown, circa 1941.

Previous tales have explored Sowerwine's department store, Bechstein's drug store, Geedy-Corey hardware, Huntington Paint and Wallpaper, and Spotts Flower Shop.

The next enterprise as we move north on Jefferson is the First National Bank, and a story of how Huntington became the first in the nation to recognize the rights of women in a very special area.

The First National Bank was at one time the well-known, three-story building at 354 N. Jefferson Street, the southwest corner of Jefferson Street and Market streets. It opened for business on Dec. 16, 1863, and was Huntington County's oldest bank when its doors were closed at that location on Oct. 25, 2000, by National City Bank. The more than 22,000-square-foot building is currently unoccupied.

In 1998, Joseph Blomeke, Assistant Vice President of First National, had announced that First National's "Southway" branch at 1410 S. Jefferson Street, would close on November 20, due to a decline in account activity as a sign of continuing problems for the bank.

First National Bank was founded Dec. 9, 1863, by Samuel H. Purviance and William McGrew. The original incorporators were John R. Coffroth, Charles B. Culver, Thomas S. Stanfield, and John Roche in addition to Purviance and McGrew. Purviance was president and McGrew was cashier. The bank's total resources at that time were \$65,298. Total resources in 1974 were reported to exceed \$60 million. It operated under a charter supervised by the U. S. Treasury Department as part of the Federal Reserve System and, after the Great Depression, the FDIC.

Its first of four banking offices was a single-story cottage on Jefferson Street opposite the Courthouse. It was founded at a time when horse-drawn wagons, buggies, and ox teams flowed past its doors, women wore "swishing skirts," and a "shilling" was a familiar term. It later moved to a one-story brick building at Franklin and Jefferson streets, then was housed on the north side of West Market Street. In 1886, a new building was erected at 354 North Jefferson St. Pictures of the original bank, with a tall turret on its corner, are quite different from its current modernistic motif. It was remodeled in 1913, 1940, and again in 1954. The last remodeling was designed by architects Stevens and Broderick and construction done by Carl Kitt and Leo Scher of Huntington.

The bank netted a profit of \$7,103.05 in its first year and the first dividend of 20 percent was declared in the bank's eighth year as a return to the early stockholders.

William McGrew became president in 1881. In 1902, Israel H. Heaston (1868-1947) was elected president and Charles McGrew vice president. When Heaston retired in 1914, Charles

McGrew (mayor of Huntington from 1918-1922) succeeded him as president. After a succession of shorter-term presidents, Dee H. Wygant (1902-1992), who had been with the bank since 1926 as a teller, trust officer, and vice president, became president in 1937. He held that position until handing it over to his son, John Wygant. Mrs. Venice Endsley was a long-time vice president of the bank.

Dee Wygant graduated from Roanoke High School and was a member of Central Christian Church, Salvation Army, Amity Lodge 483, and Ancient Order of Scottish Rite in Fort Wayne. He served as a director of the Majestic Company, the Orton Crane Company, River Forks Development Corporation, Huntington College Foundation, and YMCA Foundation. He was named a Chief of the Flint Springs Tribe in 1978. The Wygants sold the bank to Trustcorp of Toledo, Ohio in 1986, and it became Trustcorp Huntington in February 1988. What followed was a series of tumultuous years of acquisitions and branch closings.

In 1990, the bank was sold to Society Bank headquartered in Cleveland and operated as such until it was sold to Fort Wayne National Corporation in 1992 which restored the First National Bank name. In 1991, David Spangler, chairman of the bank's board of directors, announced a renovation of the bank that would dovetail with the downtown pedestrian mall and allow easy drive-up banking stations in the main parking lot and closure of the drive-up facility next to the city building. Keeping a drive-up night depository box next to the city building and police station would have been prudent. The First National Bank made headlines in 1997 when thieves managed to break open the night depository box at the Northway branch and steal its contents.

National City Bank purchased Fort Wayne National Corporation in 1998. That was followed by PNC Bank, the nation's fifth largest bank, buying all of National City's 29 branches in northeast Indiana in 2010. The lineage of the original First National Bank is now represented by the PNC location at 2020 North Jefferson St., across from the former Kriegbaum Field property.

In 1867, First National made history when it became the first bank in the nation to have a woman on its board of directors. This caused some consternation in Washington because First National was a "national bank" under federal banking regulations. Some in Washington contended women could not vote, so how could one hold a voting position as a national bank director?

Bank director David Dailey, a local attorney, had died and his wife, Anna, inherited his 20 shares of First National stock. Along with her own 10 shares, she was the fifth-largest stockholder and thereby entitled to a directorship. Mrs. Dailey had received one of the best educations available to young women at the time, having graduated from Indiana Asbury Female College in New Albany. The bank dispatched Gen. James R. Slack to use some persuasion on President U. S. Grant and the Secretary of the Treasury on the issue. He was effective and Anna Dailey (1836-1923) became the nation's first female director of a national bank.

Be sure to visit Your History and Education Center to see the large mural created by Fettinger and many other historical exhibits.

— Researched and compiled by Dr. John Regan

The Huntington County History and Education Center, 315 Court Street, is closed to visitors from now through the month of January and into early February. Regular business hours — 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays and Saturdays by appointment — will resume Wednesday, Feb. 4, 2026. Information on the collection, tours, room rental, and how to become a member of the Huntington County Historical Society is available from History and Education Center Executive Director Barbara Rupley at (260) 356-7264 or www.huntingtonhistoricalmuseum.com

Artlines:

The First National Bank building today, at North Jefferson and Market streets.