

FROM THE HUNTINGTON COUNTY HISTORY AND EDUCATION CENTER

High Style Was the Arnold Signature

*** Ninth in a series**

This week's installment continues our tour of the downtown enterprises Robert Fettingner depicted on his 19-by-8-foot mural in the History and Education Center, with an introduction to Arnold's Famous Dry Goods.

The large vertical Arnold's outdoor sign at 305 N. Jefferson Street hung on the east side of North Jefferson Street. between Bradley Brothers Rexall Drug Store at the northeast corner of Jefferson and Franklin streets and the Marx clothiers' sign, just to the north.

Henry H. Arnold (1836-1893) was born and educated in Ohio and eventually taught school there, where his pay was in the first greenback paper money ever issued by the government. In 1882, he visited his brothers in South Whitley, where he took a position as a clerk in the store of John and Jesse Arnold, eventually buying an interest in the store and meeting a Miss Annie Cleveland. He married Anna Cleveland of South Whitley in 1865, and they had one son, Charles, (1866-1936) who would eventually join his father in the business after finishing his education.

Annie Arnold (1842-1934) is referred to as "a lady of culture and refinement" as well as an excellent businesswoman who retained her interest in the firm of H. H. Arnold & Son. She was widely known for her friendly personality and acts of charity. The Methodist Church Sunday school class was even named the Annie Arnold class.

Success at South Whitley led Henry going into the dry goods business in North Manchester where he also bought an interest in a grist mill. From there he went to Huntington where he, John and Jesse bought out the general store of A. S. Purviance in 1880. Henry retained all the clerks from the Purviance operation but moved the store across the street, to 305 North Jefferson, where it would remain for the duration of its existence.

Henry's Dry Goods Store reflected his sense of refinement, uncommon for the times. A lady dressed completely in white would look after customers' children. There was a knitting corner, complete with a knitting teacher. Live canaries in cages graced the counters and the first electrically lit Christmas tree in Huntington stood — nearly two stories tall — in front of the store.

Henry unfortunately died at age 57 in 1893 and his funeral was one of the largest in the city's history. A news account at the time praised him as "... one of the most prominent in the business community ... respected by everyone."

Management of the store fell to Annie and son, Charles, who never married. Unfortunately, Henry was never able to enjoy the elegant Victorian-style home he was building at 1140 N. Jefferson Street, but his home was far enough along in 1893 for his wife and son to move there from their Frederick Street residence.

Charles and his mother enjoyed their new abode, and the entertaining done there matched the elegance of the architecture. There was a full-time chauffeur, cook, and gardener. When parties

were given, musicians were brought in from Chicago to entertain the guests in front of swans sculpted in ice.

On a more contemporary note, Mr. and Mrs. Frederick PeGan and their son, Ray, were featured in a 1975 Herald-Press article in the home — which featured six fireplaces, murals, parquet floors, solid oak and cherry woodwork, stained-glass windows, and carpeting layered in 27-inch-wide strips in the parlor and many other rooms. The PeGans were antique collectors and maintained the nostalgic home's atmosphere. The historic home is currently owned by Seth and Kortney Snyder.

In 1915, Charles extended the dry goods business into an imposing retail store on three floors. It wrapped around the Bradley Brothers drug store, which provided an entrance at 22-26 E. Franklin Street. The Arnolds also had an office in New York City with a buying consortium, thus securing prices on par with the largest retailers in the United States.

A description of the renovated store refers to it as having "...splendid lighting with display cases finished in mahogany ... glass and steel wardrobe cabinets for ladies' suits, coats and dresses. ...The fixtures speak the last word of protection of merchandise."

The second floor was devoted to household furnishings including rugs, carpet, lace curtains, draperies, window shades, linoleum, electric carpet sweepers, a full line of brass and iron beds and mattresses, plus suitcases. The third floor displayed women's, misses, and children's ready-to-wear clothing, fitting rooms, and "... at every turn large mirrors confront you." You could also find a millinery department, hairdresser and manicurist on the third floor, which was accessible by an elevator. The department store would become known as far away as Chicago.

Unfortunately, Charles's elegant retail venture might have been 20 years ahead of its time. By 1927, a petition for bankruptcy was filed and on December 30, 1934, Arnold's closed forever. Annie Arnold died that year and Charles passed away two years later. An attempt to resuscitate the business was made and the location would house a number of different establishments before it and the former Bradley Brothers store gave way to what is today the east parking lot at Franklin and Jefferson streets.

This final soliloquy was provided by the Herald-Press: "(The) luxurious home still remains, reminder of the man who made the young town of Huntington the 'shopping center' for people from miles around."

Be sure to visit YOUR History and Education Center to see Fettingner's mural and other fascinating exhibits!

— Researched and compiled by Dr. John Regan

The Huntington County History and Education Center, 315 Court Street, is closed to visitors through this month 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