

FROM THE HUNTINGTON COUNTY HISTORY AND EDUCATION CENTER

Paint, posies and a second-floor dental pioneer

***Third in a series**

This week we continue our tale of Huntington's main downtown business thoroughfare, circa 1941, as shown on the 19-by-8-foot mural painted by Robert Fettingier in 2006 on one of the History and Education Center's interior walls.

Previous tales have reported on Sowerwine's department store, Bechstein's Drug Store, and Geedy-Corey Hardware. Today's installment will examine two more of their downtown neighbors, depicted on the mural as a "paint store" and Spotts Floral Shop.

Both locations are now part of a large parking lot extending from the Smith Furniture store north to the former First National Bank building. The prior occupant of a second-floor office in this space is of local and national historical significance, and is also cited.

The "paint store" noted on the mural next to the Geedy-Corey hardware store was the Huntington Paint and Wallpaper store at 338 North Jefferson Street. B. Frank Henry is recorded as manager in 1939. In 1941, Ray A. Woodbeck is listed as president, Stella B. Woodbeck, vice president, Donald S. Brown, secretary-treasurer, and Louise Brown, assistant secretary-treasurer, which probably means she did all the bookkeeping.

Many might remember the store being operated by Roland Reese (1915-1982) from 1946 going forward. He was also the Democratic Party Chairman at that time and was eventually appointed postmaster in 1963. He was a charter member and past president of the Jaycees, a Boy Scout commissioner, member of the Elks Lodge, and First Presbyterian Church.

Frank G. Spotts (1900-1972) was born in Centerville and married Edna E. Davis (1905-1986) in New Castle in 1923. Mr. and Mrs. Spotts moved to Huntington IN in 1929 and opened Spotts Greenhouse. In 1934, they opened Spotts Floral Shop at 344 North Jefferson Street which served the community for 40 years.

They both were active in the community. Frank was a member of the United Church of Christ, Amity Lodge F&AM 483, The York Rite and Order of Eastern Star Floral Chapter No. 75, Moose Lodge and IOOF Lodge.

Edna was also a member of the same church, a past Worthy Matron of the Order of the Eastern Star, and a member of the Daughters of the Nile in Fort Wayne.

The second floor above these stores was occupied at one time by the offices of Dr. Otto Ulysses King. An Indiana historical marker, placed by the Indiana Historical Bureau in 2018 commemorating Dr. King, is located at the site.

Dr. King was elected the first executive director and editor of a reorganized American Dental Association in 1913. As editor, he produced the first Journal of the American Dental Association which was published by the Whitelock Press in Huntington and mailed from the local post office.

The first journal increased membership in the association tenfold, and has now become the premier dental journal in the world.

Dr. King was one of five dentists who founded the prestigious American College of Dentists and wrote its founding principles. President Woodrow Wilson appointed Dr. King to represent the United States at a conference in London, and Dr. King also served on the General Medical Board during World War I. He is recorded as having made 125 professional presentations in Mexico among many other accomplishments not cited here.

Locally, Dr. King was a devoted member of the Methodist Church and increased the Sunday school enrollment there from 375 to more than 1,000! He also helped rebuild the local church in 1915 and served as a delegate to the conference to unite the Methodist Episcopal and Methodist Church South.

Dr. King was a member of Rotary and attended its international convention in Rio de Janeiro. His mother, Xantha, was an active “oratoricalist” member of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. His brother, Emmett, was high school valedictorian, played football at Indiana University for four years and then played center on the Harvard University team while earning his law degree there.

After graduating as president of his class at Northwestern University Dental School, Dr. King married “... a very popular young society leader in this city ... Miss Mayme Beaver,” as stated in a local news report.

The Kings had two children. Walter became an orthopedic surgeon who landed on Utah Beach at noon on D-Day. Helen became an artist of note in Richmond, Va., and donated several of her works to local schools, and a hospital, YMCA, and library.

This brief King biography is significant to the community and to the History and Education Center, which has a collection of their memorabilia. Dr. Otto Ulysses King should be remembered as one of Huntington’s and Indiana’s greatest citizens.

Visit YOUR History and Education Center to see the Fettinger mural and the King family exhibit.

— Researched and compiled by Dr. John Regan

Visit the Huntington County History and Education Center, at 315 Court Street, from 10-a.m.-4 p.m. Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, and Saturdays by appointment. More information on the Center’s collection, tours, room rental, and how to become a member of the Huntington County Historical Society is available from Executive Director Barbara Rupley at (260) 356-7264 or www.huntingtonhistoricalmuseum.com

Artlines:

Both sides of the Dr. Otto U. King historical marker at the current site of his former office, on the west side of Jefferson Streets between Market and Franklin streets. The front view of the marker shows the Smith Furniture building in background.

