

Gass Ladies Shop

FROM THE HUNTINGTON COUNTY HISTORY AND EDUCATION CENTER

It was ladies first for this family business

***Seventh in a series**

This week continues our tour of businesses — circa 1940s — on Robert Fettingner's 19-by-8-foot mural on the west wall of the History and Education Center's V. Jean Gernand Room. The mural's last clearly discernible image depicted on the west side of downtown Jefferson Street was Gass's Ladies Shop.

The official listing of the beginning of Gass's Ladies Shop, at 438 N. Jefferson Street, was in 1946. It took a while to get there, however.

Raymond Otto Gass (1895-1983) was born in Decatur, Ind., where his father was in the ladies' apparel business. He married the former Helen Keller in 1920. Raymond's father wanted to expand their Decatur business and established him as manager of "The Ladies Shop" at 5 East Market Street in Huntington, in 1932. Raymond and Helen turned the business over to their son, Raymond Eugene Gass (1921-2010) and his wife, Mary, before retiring to Culver, Ind. A World War I veteran, Raymond O. Gass was the oldest member of VFW Post 6919 of Culver at the time of his death, and also was a member of the Knights of Columbus.

From 1935 until 1941, Raymond E. Gass was owner and manager of the "Mary Anne Shoppe," at 20 W. Market Street. The Depression and bank closings during that period were not kind to them at that location. However, it had also caused their future store location on Jefferson Street to be vacant since 1941. That opened an opportunity for a prime future retail outlet.

Never daunted, Raymond E. Gass opened the "Gass's Ladies Shop" in 1946 at 438 North Jefferson, and the business proved to be very successful post-World War II. Raymond was one of the founding members of the local Jaycees and active in the Knights of Columbus. Raymond E. Gass and his wife, Mary, operated the shop until selling it to their son, John Joseph Gass and his wife, Donna (1947-2024) in 1970 and retiring to Port St. Lucie, Fla.

John was attending Palm Beach Junior College when he entered the U. S. Army Reserve in 1968 during the Vietnam War. Following basic training, he returned to Huntington to take over ownership of the Gass's Ladies Shop. Donna was a well-known and well-liked teacher with the Huntington County Community School Corporation for 25 years while raising their three children. John was very active in the community. He was one of the youngest presidents of the Jaycees, active in the Chamber of Commerce, Knights of Columbus, and Salvation Army in addition to being president of the Huntington County Baseball league for many years.

The late 1960s saw the creation of the Huntington Plaza strip mall of North Jefferson Street, and the arrival of JC Penney and Target. of JCPenny and Target. Around 1974, a downtown pedestrian mall was also created, which was very esthetically interesting but which eliminated convenient parking in front of the small retail stores. Such competition made it difficult for small family businesses to survive in most communities. It is a tribute to Gass's Ladies Shop that it had established such a loyal customer base to last another 20 years.

However, by 1994, John Gass decided it was time to close the store and ended nearly a century of Gass entrepreneurship in the ladies' clothing market.

Be sure to visit the History and Education Center to see Fettinger'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 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

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Artlines:

The building at 438 N. Jefferson Street, which housed Gass's Ladies Shop from 1946 to 1994, was most recently the Metronet office.