

Old Bank Building has served business as bank, eatery, phone company

By HEIDI M. BAUMSTARK
 Observer staff

The yellow brick building that sits at the corner of Washington and Jefferson streets in Haymarket is called The Old Bank Building, at 14951 Washington St. In the past, the building did serve as a bank: The Bank of Haymarket.

The building has also served as many other things. Years before Haymarket's 1799 incorporation as a town, famous figures traveled these roads according to Robert Crewdson's booklet, "Crossroads of the Past: A History of Haymarket, Virginia," in 1781, General Anthony "Mad" Wayne marched 1,500 troops from Pennsylvania over what is now Jefferson Street on his way to reinforce the Continental Army for the infamous battle in Yorktown, Oct. 19, 1781.

Ronald R. Turner writes in his book, "Prince William County Virginia Businesses 1805-1955," that the Bank of Haymarket was incorporated Jan. 25, 1922. At that time, William M. Jordan served as president; Robert Antrim Rust was vice president and Wade Cleveland Payne was secretary.

Eighty-five years later, the building is still known as the Old Bank Building. Two businesses—Brooke Insurance and Financial Services and Aggressive Mortgage Corporation—occupy the historic building.

Some local residents remember when it served other purposes.

Gainesville resident Mike Kidwell remembers his grandmother, Lillian Brady, telling a story about the bank. His grandmother grew up in town and has memories of the bank's opening. "There was a large line of curious town folk," Kidwell remembers his grandmother telling him, "and the bank was passing out trinkets to the adults and oranges to the children. She told me how excited she and the other children were to receive an orange; perhaps this was a rare treat since they were so thrilled," Kidwell said.

Many years later, Alan Gossom said the building served as a telephone company. This life-long Haymarket resident remembers the Piedmont Telephone Company occupying the building in the 1950s. Stanley Owens ran the company and owned the building, Gossom said.

Wallace Bailey who has lived in downtown Haymarket since 1947 remembers the phone company as well. He said, "I went to work for Mr. Owens in 1951 when I was only 16; I had to get a work permit since I was so young." Bailey was a lineman and installer for the company; he said the phone company was there from the late 1940s through the mid-1960s.

"In those days, a telephone switchboard operator sat in the upper level portion of the building facing Washington Street. The rest of the upper floor was a small apartment," Bailey remembered. "Bill Manuel and his wife, who was one of the switchboard operators, lived there." The main level was used as storage for supplies from the phone company.

"Since the fire house was right next door, when someone called the switchboard to report a fire, the operator pushed a button to blow the town's siren. Two blasts meant it was a fire in town; three blasts declared the emergency was out of town," Bailey recalls.

Former Haymarket postmaster and long-time resident Ellen Wilson said the building has changed hands throughout the years. "In 1975, when I first arrived in town, it was First Virginia Bank; a woman named Pete Hawks was the branch manager and it was just half the size it is now."

In the late 1980s, the building catered to a different clientele; it served as a restaurant. In spring 1987, Greg and Robin Hartle, residents of Bull Run Mountain, leased the building. The Hartles opened Bonnie & Clyde's Eatery serving in-laws and outlaws from around the county.

Robin Hartle said the name fit because it had been a bank. "I remem-

ber the huge walk-in vault in the back." During this time, the exterior was painted light grey with a large red sign in front and a caricature of Bonnie & Clyde—the popular gangster couple famous for robbing banks during the Great Depression. Greg Hartle was a former Washington Redskins middle line-backer in the 1970s.

"We owned the restaurant for a little over two years and then Isabel

Ortega owned it and it became the Old Bank Café," Robin said.

Later, Barbara Hardy took over the café. After years as a food establishment, a company supplying office machines came next, remembers Wilson. Later, Don Costello became sole owner of the building and constructed the one-story brick addition to the original structure around the 1990s, according to Gossom.

Currently, Joe and Peg Contrucci own the building and lease it to Brooke Insurance and Financial Services and Aggressive Mortgage Corp.

Eddy Lang, agency owner of Brooke Insurance and Financial Services, said, "I've been here since September 2004; before we moved in, the Old Bank Building Insurance Agency was here. I really enjoy working in this historic building in town."

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