

Chessie Room, Circa 1920

Today, I found an article on Facebook about the old Bank of Huntington building. Built in 1875 at the eastern end of the downtown area, it served as the main bank in Huntington for many years. It gained notoriety in the late 1800's when it was robbed by the James gang. For many years the folklore was that Jesse James himself was responsible for the robbery.

Flash forward to 1915 or 1916. Other banks had been built and had taken over as the main banks in Huntington. I'm not sure what became of the first floor of the building, whether it became some sort of other business or not, but what I do know is that the second floor was leased as an apartment in those years.

I know this, because I remember as a child, driving past the building on 3rd Ave. with my father, and having him point up to the two arched windows on the second floor and telling me, "That's where Mammy Mills (my grandmother) and us five kids lived when we first moved to Huntington from Beckley, when I was just a baby. You know...they say Jesse James robbed it when it was a bank."

I remember looking up at what seemed an awfully small place in which a newly widowed woman and her five children to live in. And as the years passed, and I started driving myself, every time I'd go past the old building. I'd look up at those windows and think of the link to my family's past. I always wanted to go up to take a look at where the family I knew, began its roots in Huntington...but never had the opportunity to do so.

It was in the mid-seventies when instead of tearing the old building down to make way for a new thoroughfare, the town decided to relocate the old building about two blocks west and a block north to what would become Heritage Station. The old railway station was there, and by locating the old bank building there, it became a place for restoration and new commerce to begin.

The buildings there have housed various businesses throughout the last forty some years, and still today, they are a focal point for people visiting downtown Huntington.

A year or so ago, my brother Mark returned to Huntington for a high school reunion. He made a point to stop in at the wine store now housed on the ground floor of the old bank. He snapped some pictures of the interior for me.....the original teller cages...the antique woodwork and the stairs leading up to the second floor. Looking at the photos, I imagined that somewhere in time, my grandmother, her four daughters and my dad must have walked those same stairs many years ago.

I made it a point...and promised myself that when I make a return visit to Huntington, maybe my last...I too was going to go inside that old building, if for nothing more than to pay my respects to a past, now too far gone for most to remember.

Then today...I found the article about the “Chessie Room”. It seems a man and his wife have made that old second floor apartment into a bed and breakfast. They named it for the old C&O Railway mascot, the Chessie cat. Taking a look at the photos of the restored rooms made me smile. It was there in these small rooms that my father began his life in Huntington, an area where he would remain for the rest of his life.

So now....I know that when I return to my old hometown, I’m certainly going to try my best to book this room for my visit.

Who knows?.....maybe just as I’m falling asleep...I’ll once again feel a kiss “goodnight” on my forehead from Mammy Mills, Gladys, Beulah, Ruth, Jessie and my dad.







