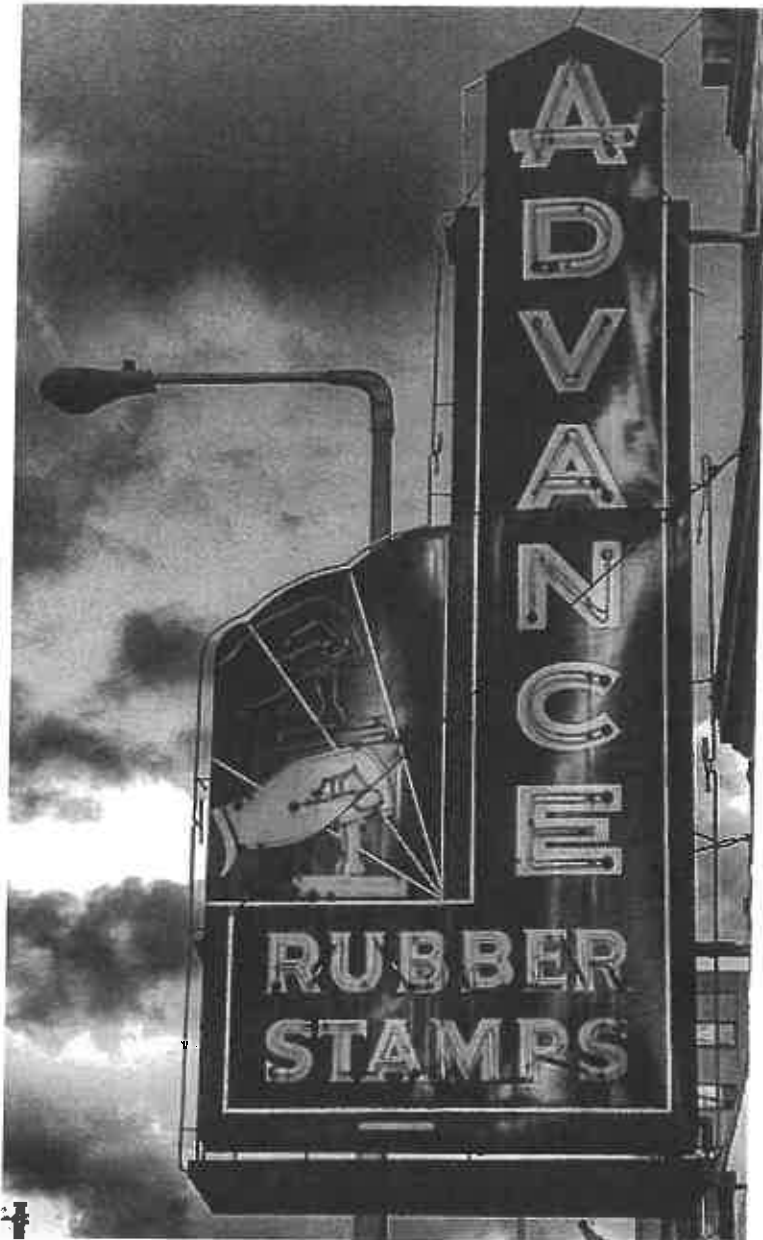


The Cronin, Baker and Tindall Building
aka Advance Rubber Stamps
An Architectural History



Prepared by Judith Johnson
"The House Detective"
July 2018

339 Madison Avenue
The West 25 feet of the West 75 feet of Lot 11
Of the Murphy and Elder Subdivision

Designed in 1913, the Commercial-style building's construction was delayed until 1917 because of World War I. The two-story commercial block is frame construction with brick veneer side elevations and an embossed terra cotta storefront with single light, replacement commercial windows and an incised front entry on the ground floor. A multi-light, three part isinglass transom spans the façade. A terra cotta rope outlines the storefront and that in turn is surrounded by incised rectangular terra cotta blocks that delineate the entire first floor.

The rectangle shape terra cotta name plate located above the façade entrance engraved Cronin, Baker & Tindall acts as a belt course between the first and second stories and as a bottom lintel for the second story windows. The second floor has three sets of wood, multi-light casement windows with terra cotta surrounds. Each set of the casement windows are surrounded in rectangular terra cotta blocks and are topped with an elaborate lintel with dentils on the bottom.

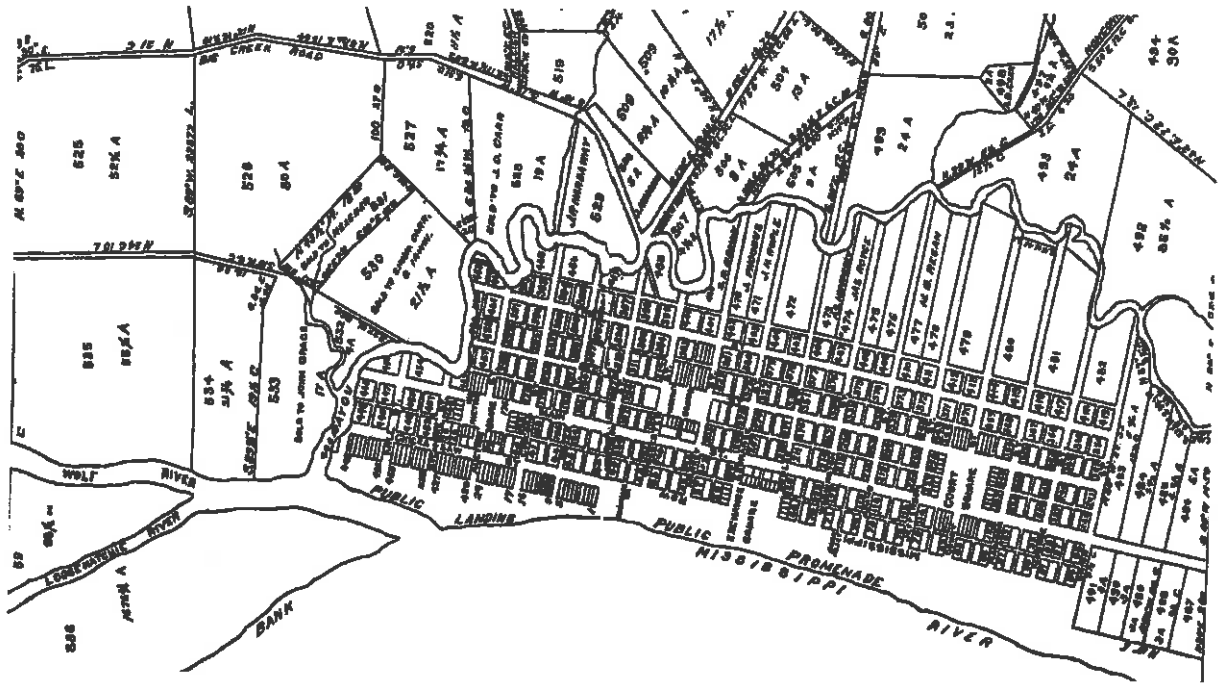
The parapet wall is tripartite with a line of cartouches on the very bottom and rectangle strips of terra cotta separated by pateras and a vertical decoration separating the three parts. The coping is rounded terra cotta and finials decorate either end.

The neon sign dates to post WW 2. It is sheet metal overlaid with porcelain enamel. It is I-shaped with a peaked top, and outlined in neon tubing. The block letter word Advance is vertical with a white background and Rubber and Stamps are located horizontally above one another at the bottom with yellow lettering. The neon tubes were filled with various gases. The defining characteristic of the sign is located on the northern side and outlined in a white line. A pink fleshed hand extending from a business suit and white shirt is clutching a rectangular wooden stamp with rubber on the bottom. The neon lights flash on and off in such a way that the hand appears to be stamping a piece of paper. The sign is not protected by metal screening and the elevation of Madison Avenue in front of the building has resulted in the neon being repeatedly broken by flying rocks and other road debris. It is almost the only remaining neon sign in Memphis and is a work of art in its own right.

Statement of Significance



Present day Memphis and Shelby County was the ancestral home of the Chickasaw Indians. The state of Tennessee was also a western claim of North Carolina until our statehood in 1796. A profit oriented real estate speculator named John Rice, conceived a land promotion scheme in the early 1790s on a 5,000-acre grant of land on the Third Chickasaw Bluff even though the aboriginal inhabitants were not displaced until the Chickasaw Cession of 1818 which finally allowed European settlers into the area. Nonetheless, the in absentia Rice promoted the land located at the mouth of "the Big Hatcha" as 100 acre lots for \$33.33 at the time of landing. Rice met his untimely demise at the hands of Indians in 1791 before ever setting foot on his holdings and his brother sold it to Judge John Overton of Nashville for \$500 in 1794.



1819 Plat-Lawrence Survey of Memphis, Tennessee

In October 1818, William Winchester accompanied Andrew Jackson and Isaac Shelby to the signing of the Chickasaw Cession (Jackson Purchase) and traveled on to the Chickasaw Bluff to report on the land investment owned by his father, Jackson, and John Overton. Winchester and surveyor William Lawrence drew up a plan for a town that his father named Memphis. The boundaries were Mississippi River on the west, present day Bellevue Avenue on the east, Union Avenue on the south, and Bickford Avenue on the north.

They named the north-south streets Front, Main, Second, Third Streets extending from Bayou Gayoso to Union Street, the south line of the grant. There were 362 lots laid off on the plat. There were at first four public squares, and between the river front lots and the river, an ample promenade was marked Reserved. The blocks were laid out on a quarter block plan with each lot a 148 ½ feet square divided by 24 foot alleys. The parcels beyond present day Third Street out to the Bayou Gayoso (now channelized as Danny Thomas Boulevard) were designated Country Lots.

The subject property was originally located on Country Lot 483. It became the West 25 feet of the West 75 feet of Lot 11 of the Murphy and Elder Subdivision. It is not known when this subdivision was platted or if it was ever recorded.

The property passed through several hands before being purchased from banker Newton Perkins by the partners of Cronin, Baker and Tindall, Inc. in October, 1912. It is not understood why the property was not constructed until 1918.

William W. Cronin, William W. Baker and William Tindall opened their business, Cronin, Baker and Tindall, Inc. here in 1919, the year World War I ended. Cronin, a master plumber was the company president, and served as president of the Tennessee Master Plumber's Association in 1913. The business sold gas, steam fitting, plumbing and electrical supplies. The illustration below is from the 1919 Polk's City Directory Business Section.

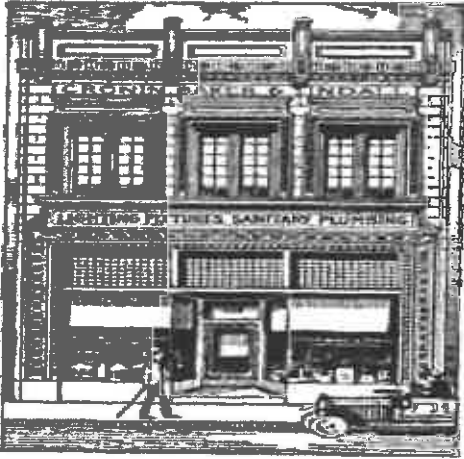
16

W. W. CRONIN, President *T. W. BAKER, Sec. and Treas.*
W. W. TINDALL, Vice-Pres.

Cronin, Baker & Tindall

—PLUMBING—

**Plumb-
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The illustration shows a three-story building with a prominent entrance. Above the entrance, there is a sign that reads 'CRONIN, BAKER & TINDALL'. Below that, another sign lists 'FIXTURES, LIGHTING, SANITARY, PLUMBING'. A vintage car from the early 20th century is parked on the street in front of the building.

**Elec-
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Sup-
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Gas and Electric Lighting Fixtures

339 MADISON AVENUE

TELEPHONES 493 *MEMPHIS, TENN.*

(1919) E. L. FOLK & CO.'S

Cronin died in 1931 and his widow Mary became president of the business but it closed a few years later.

Form 91, 2-14
MARGIN RESERVED FOR BINDING
WRAP PLAINLY, WITH UNFADING INK—THIS IS A PERMANENT RECORD. Every item of information should be carefully supplied. AGE should be stated EXACTLY. PHYSICIANS should state CAUSE OF DEATH in plain terms, so that it may be properly classified. Exact statement of OCCUPATION is very important. See instructions on back of certificate.

Form 91, 2-14
N. B.—WRAP PLAINLY, WITH UNFADING INK—THIS IS A PERMANENT RECORD. Every item of information should be carefully supplied. AGE should be stated EXACTLY. PHYSICIANS should state CAUSE OF DEATH in plain terms, so that it may be properly classified. Exact statement of OCCUPATION is very important. See instructions on back of certificate.

1. PLACE OF DEATH				STATE OF TENNESSEE STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH Division of Vital Statistics CERTIFICATE OF DEATH			
County <u>Shelby</u>				Registration District No. _____ File No. <u>670</u>			
Civil Dis. _____				Primary Registration District No. _____ Reg. No. <u>1285</u>			
Village _____				(No. <u>153 Eastmoreland</u> St.; _____ Ward)			
City <u>Memphis</u>				(If death occurred in a hospital or institution, give the NAME instead of street and number)			
Length of residence in city or town where death occurred _____				How long in U. S. if of foreign birth _____			
2. FULL NAME <u>WILLIAM WALLACE CRONIN</u>				(If deceased give city or town and State)			
(a) Residence: No. <u>1133 Eastmoreland</u> St., _____ Ward.				(If deceased give city or town and State)			
PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS				MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH			
3. SEX <u>M</u>	4. COLOR OR RACE <u>W</u>	5. SINGLE, MARRIED, WIDOWED OR DIVORCED (write the word) <u>Married</u>		21. DATE OF DEATH (month, day, and year) <u>March 31</u> , 19 <u>31</u>			
6a. If married, widowed, or divorced HUSBAND of (or) WIFE of <u>Mary K. Cronin</u>				22. I HEREBY CERTIFY, That I attended deceased from <u>3-10</u> 19 <u>31</u>			
8. DATE OF BIRTH (month, day, and year) <u>Feb. 14, 1857</u>				I last saw h. _____ alive on <u>3-31</u> 19 <u>31</u> , death is said to have occurred on the date stated above, at <u>5:55 P.</u>			
7. AGE Years <u>74</u> Months <u>1</u> Days <u>17</u>		IF LESS than 1 day, _____ hr. or _____ min.		The principal cause of death and related causes of importance in order of causal sequence follows: <u>Coronary atherosclerosis.</u>			
9. Trade, profession, or particular kind of work done, as reported by nearest relatives, etc. <u>Electrical and Plumbing Supply</u>				The principal cause of importance not related to principal cause: <u>Pneumonia (terminal)</u>			
10. Date deceased last worked at this occupation (month and year) _____				11. Total time spent in this occupation _____			
12. BIRTHPLACE (city or town) (State or country) <u>Connecticut</u>				Name of operation _____ Date of _____			
13. NAME <u>Deziel Cronin</u>				What test confirmed diagnosis? _____ Was there an autopsy? _____			
14. BIRTHPLACE (city or town) (State or country) <u>Ireland</u>				23. If death was due to external causes (violence) fill in also the following: Accident, suicide, or homicide? _____ Date of injury _____ 19 <u>_____</u>			
15. MAIDEN NAME _____				Where did injury occur? _____ (Specify city or town, county, and State) Specify whether injury occurred in industry, in home, or in public place.			
16. BIRTHPLACE (city or town) (State or country) _____				Manner of injury _____			
17. INFORMANT <u>Mary K. Cronin</u> (Address) <u>1133 Eastmoreland</u>				Nature of injury _____			
18. BURIAL, CREMATION, OR REMOVAL Place <u>Calvary</u> Date <u>10-31</u>				24. Was disease or injury in any way related to occupation of deceased? _____ If so, specify _____ (Signed) <u>J. A. Harris</u> M. D. (Address) _____			
19. UNDERTAKER <u>J. W. Morris, Inc.</u> (Address) _____				20. FILED <u>4-2</u> 19 <u>31</u> <u>L. M. Graven</u> Registrar			

Mary purchased it from the partnership in May of 1937 and rented out to a series of businesses until September 1944 when she sold it to Paul and Lucille Gruenberg and William Gruenberg, Paul's brother.

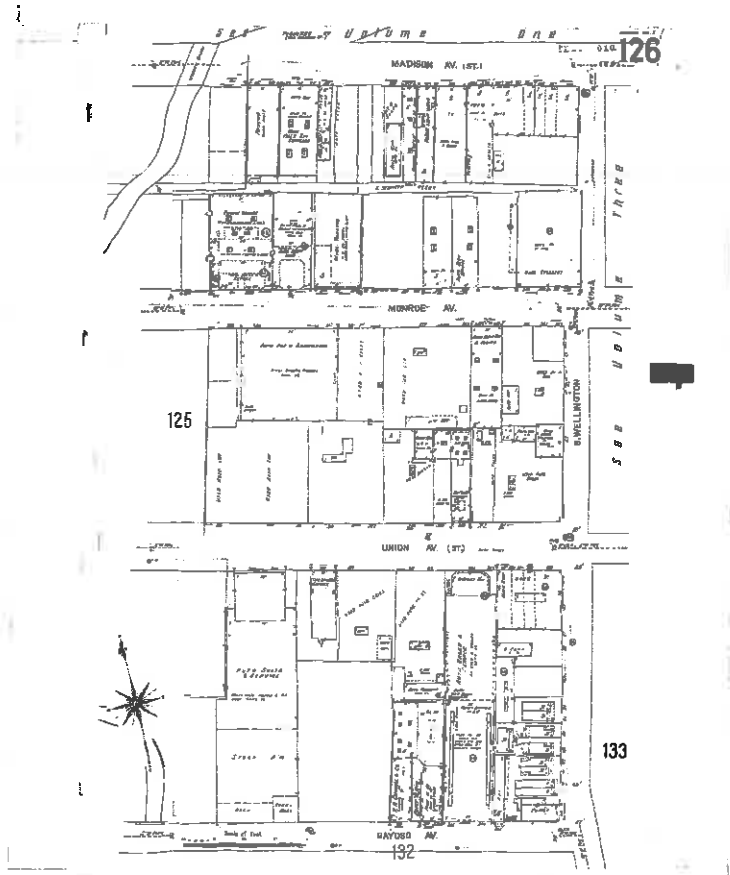
Paul Gruenberg was born in Illinois in 1912 and reared in Little Rock, Arkansas. He began Advance Rubber Stamps there with his father, Walter and brother Bill in 1927. After their father's death in 1939, the Gruenbergs moved the business to Memphis.



Paul Gruenberg in 1967.

The Gruenberg Brothers, moved their Advance Rubber Stamps Works to 339 Madison Avenue in 1945. Paul and his wife Lucille lived on the second floor. It was considered the first adaptive reuse project in Memphis.

The 1951 Sanborn Map pictured below shows the property before the Madison Avenue overpass was constructed. It is labeled Advance Rubber Stamps.



Beginning in 1976, Memphis Heritage Inc., a local historic preservation organization awarded the Paul Gruenberg Commercial Rehabilitation Award to recognize the adaptive reuse of historic buildings. Paul Gruenberg died a year later in 1977 at age 64.

The property was sold the next year to Thomas and Wylodine Davis with the stipulation that Lucille Gruenberg be allowed to occupy the second floor apartment for two years, utilities paid and be allowed to access it from the ground floor. It was intimidated that Mrs. Gruenberg might die during that time, but she live until 1988.

In March 2005, Charles and Regina Hodges bought the building. Hodges continued to run Advance Rubber Stamps Works and Accurate Graphics at that location. In March 2010 the building was foreclosed on by Union Planters Bank and sold at auction in 2013. At that time, the current owner, Nate Mitchell purchased the property and has owned it since that time.

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Sanborn-Ferris Map Company. *Fire Insurance Maps of Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee*. New York: Pelham, 1951 series.

Shelby County Bureau of Records and Archives.

University of Memphis Special Collection



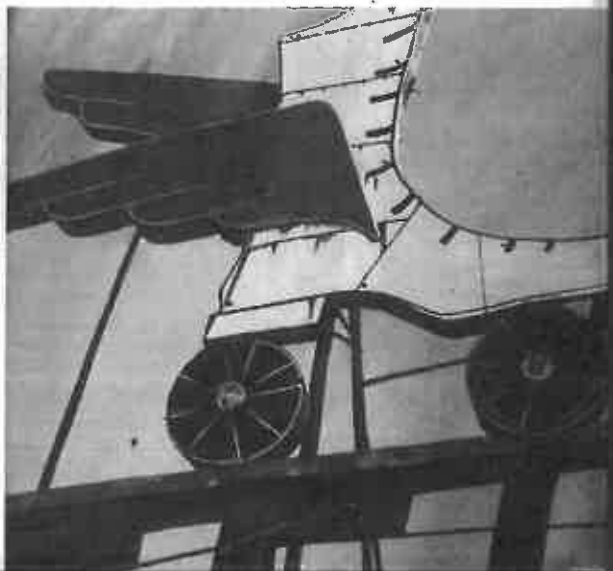
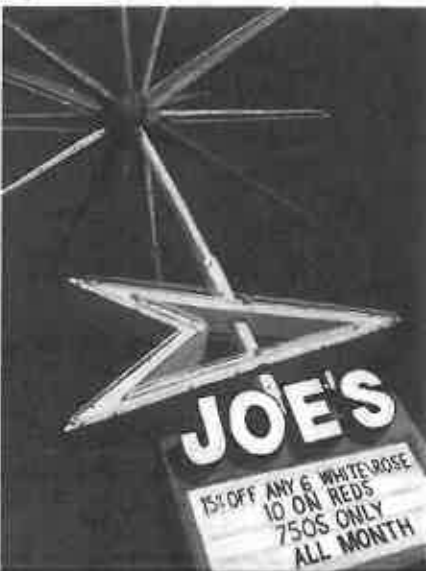
SOULSVILLE



MEMPHIS TYPE HISTORY

Signs and Stories From Just Around the Corner →

WRITTEN BY: CAITLIN L. HORTON ARTWORK BY: REBECCA PHILLIPS





*Painting of Advance Rubber Stamp Works sign. The sign remains mounted on the building at 339 Madison Avenue. **Rebecca Phillips.***

THE GHOSTS OF ADVANCE RUBBER STAMPS

The empty building at 339 Madison Avenue still wears reminders of its past, namely the large sign above the door. A giant hand holds an old-fashioned wooden stamp beside the words, Advance Rubber Stamps, all outlined in neon. Above the sign, three different families resided in the upstairs apartment, while their multiple businesses stayed busy underneath, in an industry that evolved and changed over the last century.

Blueprints for this property were drawn in May of 1913, and construction was completed just as the U.S. entered World War I, in April 1917. In its first life, the building housed the plumbing, electrical, and heating company Cronin, Baker & Tindall. "Memphis Greets You," a publication by the Business Men's Club - Chamber of Commerce, praised the company for its modern product line, applauded its unique business model, and admired their truly avant-garde showroom, with lighting and plumbing fixtures that dripped from the ceiling and glistened on every available tabletop. The publication noted, "The show rooms reflect the latest patterns in all that pertains to plumbing, bathroom fixtures and electrical furnishings. In fact, there is not a new thing on the market in that line that is not to be found there. The display of the wares and furnishings handled by the firm is proof of the fact that only the latest and most modern of equipment is handled." Undoubtedly some of these "latest patterns" were among those Cronin, Baker & Tindall installed in high-end locales like the Cotton Exchange and hotels like the Peabody, the

Chisca, and the Gayoso.

Cronin, Baker & Tindall staff was described as "sober and painstaking." Perhaps these traits were due to the unusual structure of the business that made employees company stockholders. "This business policy has made their workmen more proficient than the average 'hired' force and has given a tone to their operations which places them in the front rank of artistic plumbers and electricians," said their profile in "Memphis Greets You."

In 1944, the Gruenbergs purchased the building from William Cronin's widow for \$17,000. Three years later, the Gruenberg brothers Paul and William, and Lillian M. Gruenberg paid twenty dollars to file the corporate charter for Advance Rubber Stamp Works, Inc. The brothers renovated the building, adding both the Advance Rubber Stamps sign out front and an apartment upstairs, where the family lived.

One of the Gruenbergs' long-time employees was Thomas A. Davis. Davis began Accurate Engraving Service with his wife, Wylodine. The fledgling business operated out of their daughter's bedroom at first, then in 1978 they purchased the Madison Avenue building as well as the Gruenbergs' business. They ran Advance Rubber Stamp Works, Inc., and Accurate Engraving Service for the next 27 years.

The businesses changed hands to Charles and Regina Hodges in 2004. The Hodges changed the company names to Advance Rubber Stamp Works and Accurate Graphics. Under the Hodges' management, the business focused



building

more on signage and printing than engraving small items. The fixtures and lighting showroom turned stamp company transformed into a building that housed two distinct businesses. "When you walked in, one side was Advance Rubber Stamps and one side was Accurate Graphics. Depending on what you needed you went to this person or that person," recalls Jeremy Smith, co-owner of Sign Smiths.

In 2012, Jeremy and Christopher Smith purchased both of Hodges' businesses and formed Sign Smiths. They operated from the Madison Avenue building for the first year. Jeremy Smith not only worked in the building, but when the day was done he walked upstairs to the apartment where he lived until Sign Smiths relocated in

2013. The year spent there with his two children marked the third time owners of the building called it home. The hundred-year-old building made an impression on Smith. "The living room... was just immaculate. It had this huge mirror over the fireplace and it was all wood. Like a log cabin kind of feel to it. Just gorgeous."

A few unique features of the building created memories for the Smith family. The many nooks and crannies were an ideal environment for games of hide-and-seek. "It was like a labyrinth," says Smith. He fondly recalls the hand-operated freight elevator at the back, and one of the oldest operational elevators in Memphis, still equipped with gate and all. "My kids loved to ride that kind of stuff." The Smith children weren't the

*The Cronin, Baker & Tindall showroom featured the latest trends in lighting and plumbing fixtures. **Memphis Greets You.***



Cronin, Baker & Tindall

first youngsters to enjoy this sort of play, either. A Gruenberg grandchild once told Smith how they used to ride the freight elevator to the top floor, then let the rope go and shoot all the way down to the basement. "It would just take off. It never would crash because it had counterweights, so you could only go a certain speed," Smith cautions. Smith frequently discovered remnants of the building's former inhabitants. Once, as he tore down the wallpaper in his son's room, he came across a growth chart the Gruenbergs started back in the 1940s. It recorded their kids' growth up to the 1960s. One closet featured Hopalong Cassidy wallpaper.

Less visible signs of previous occupants were the unexplained bumps in the night. "I'm not saying it's haunted. But I'm not saying it's not haunted either," Smith says of the building. Since the apartment was above the business, he often attempted to find the source of any unusual sounds. "You'd hear weird noises. And it was one of those things where I would get up and search the building, thinking somebody's in the building," Smith insists he is a skeptic and likely to find an explanation for such happenings. However, there were a few "hair raising, goose bump moments" he simply could not explain, like the noise of a door slamming, yet when he investigated, all the doors in the building were open. "Of course there's been rumors of different people passing away in the building," Smith adds. Some of them lived in the building, while others worked there when they passed.

When asked about the current state of the property, Smith explains, "It's a hundred year old building. It needs some TLC." High utility

bills and the typical limitations of a downtown location, such as lack of customer parking, prompted Sign Smiths to move from Madison Avenue. Being downtown sometimes had its thrills, though. "There was a club next door and a lot of times we'd have people twirling fire and hula-hooping out in the street out front," Smith describes, laughing. The building sat in a prime location for viewing fireworks at AutoZone Park. The family often watched the show from the parking lot or an open window.

Advance Rubber Stamps, now Sign Smiths, has changed in more ways than just location. The stamp industry itself developed into a very different business that contrasts sharply with the days of the Gruenbergs or the Davises. These days the company includes just the two brothers. "When Charlie [Hodges] took over for the Davises, he had ten employees; but he started introducing equipment that, as this piece would come in and somebody would leave, we wouldn't necessarily have to replace them right away or at all," says Smith.

When Advance Rubber Stamps began, each stamp and sign was hand-carved. Today's technological advancements mean the Smith brothers can operate a smaller, more efficient shop. "I can put \$500 worth of stuff in the laser for thirty minutes and walk away and... go to the CNC router and set up a thousand dollar job that's going to run for thirty minutes... By the time I'm done with that the laser's done," he describes. "I'm not sitting here carving signs by hand anymore." Smith can now make ten flash stamps in the same amount of time it took to make a single old-fashioned polymer stamp.

Smith clearly has a love for the old ways

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of doing things, even with all the new available technology. He discusses one piece of equipment the brothers had to leave behind when they moved from Madison Avenue. "The one that broke my heart, it was a [Gorton] pantograph machine. I heard that came off of a naval ship." The interesting detail about the machine was that its work in one spot actually happened on a larger scale on the other side. "It had a spindle with a router bit in it. I would have a letter that was made of metal and maybe a piece of plastic over here that I'm cutting. I'd trace the metal letter, and it would cut it out in plastic or a jig or something like that," he says

about the time-consuming process. The CNC router can now computerize this job with very little human involvement.

The hundred-year-old building that stands at 339 Madison Avenue stores more than the stamp industry's left-behind relics, now useless for modern business. The walls saw three families come and go, and listened in on decades of change in downtown Memphis. As it awaits new owners, the fireworks that follow summer baseball games will continue to light up the sky over its roof while concert music from W.C. Handy Park drifts by on the wind.

"IT WAS SUCH A MAGICAL TIME,
WHEN I WAS GROWING UP, TO GO DOWNTOWN
AS A YOUNG GIRL." — VICKI JACKSON