The Past Revealed

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PHOTOS BY SAMANTHA HIMES

A t 121 N. Tallassee Street stands an old building. Its rainwater-stained red and black bricks have been there for over 120 years. Its architecture is reminiscent of a time before telephones and automobiles.

This building was the Tallapoosa County Bank. It was built in 1894, the first bank in the entire county. The building was constructed by William Gray, a prominent Dadeville businessman who was said to have been the wealthiest man in the county at the time.

The bank was a blessing to an area that had previously been without one. It would have provided Tallapoosa County residents with far more options for saving, storing, lending and transferring money, allowing the area more opportunities to grow economically. With a bank, loans could be made for people to buy land, buildings or livestock without having to have the entirety of the money upfront or being in dept to a personal lender. Some in Tallapoosa County even paid the bank in alternative ways, such as one man who paid in installments of hay.

However, around the 1930s, banks across the United States failed, leading to a total economic collapse that would eventually be known as the Great Depression. The Tallapoosa County bank closed in 1931, along with over 9,000 other banks across the United States.

The building sat dormant until the 1950s, when it was purchased by Marian Tucker and converted into the Tucker Insurance Agency. Doing so required plenty of renovations. So, drywall was put up over old fireplaces, and the walk-in bank vault was made less visible. What was once a staple of history from half a century prior had been transformed into a simple office space. It remained that way for some time.

"I only went in there a few times, and I never even realized the vault was there. I would just go in to say hello or visit with them," said Sharon Gaither, secretary of the Tallapoosa Historical Society.

Gaither has been with the historical society since 1970. Her organization's museum was located in a loft just above the bank. She and others remember the old building as an insurance office, owned by Marian Tucker. In 2003, Tucker passed away, leaving

Banking on Dadeville
A renovation at the former Tallapoosa County Bank in Dadeville uncovered original fireplaces, ceilings and floors.

ownership of the building to change until arriving in the hands of two business partners in July of 2023. One of those partners was Anne Marie Jones.

To Jones, it was important that the history of the building be made apparent. She and her partner bought the building with the hopes of restoring as much Dadeville history as possible while keeping the space commercially viable.

"The truth is, I bought it because I love the local history," said Jones. "My co-owner and I are very interested in the revitalization of the town. But also, very interested in all of the history. And so, when I found out that the building was going to be coming up for sale, I wanted to do some restoration, so it could be part of the community and able to bring a business into it. And make it so people who had never even seen the inside of the building could see the inside of the building."

The original building, built in the late 19th century, was constructed by first placing the walk-in iron vault. The rest of the building was constructed around that vault, and double-layered bricks were put up to create the walls and roof of the bank. The wooden plank floorboards were added last.

Renovations to the building began with the removal of three layers of dropped ceiling tiles. Underneath was the original pinewood ceiling, which also comprised the upstairs sub floor. The sheetrock wall partitions, the staple of any stereotypical office space, were removed as well, which uncovered two fireplaces originally built while the bank was operational. It unveiled original wainscoting from the early 20th century, as well as trim bearing the same green paint that would have been seen by cashiers and bank patrons over a hundred years prior. Jones and her business partner remarked on how much they enjoyed sharing this recently uncovered history with the previous owners of the building.

"For decades, nobody even ever had walked inside this building," said Jones. "And also, since 1950, nobody knew that that original wainscotting and those fireplaces even existed. The people we bought it from didn't even know that existed. When I called them and started sending them pictures of it all, they were just blown away and so excited to see it."

Much of the bank was either missing or past repair, so Jones sourced period-appropriate materials from around the area to fill out the early 20th century look. Jones added mantels to the fireplaces, sourced from an old home in Columbus, Georgia, that was built during the same time period as the bank. In addition, Jones found old-fashioned bank teller

Discovery
Top: An old photograph of bank officers and employees has been framed and hangs in the building today; Center: Two bells in the vault will be hung to the right and left of the outer vault door; Left: These antique dimes were found in the vault during the remodel.

windows from the Tennessee Valley Bank in North Alabama.

A Silent Past
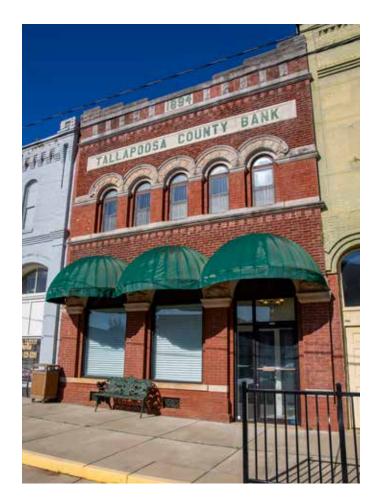When it was built in 1894, the county's first bank transformed economics for everyone who lived here in one way or another.

The restoration of the bank is something local historian Sharon Gaither can get behind. As someone who has borne witness to so much Dadeville history, and someone who has served as a repository for all that history, she is glad to see other means of passing down the stories of Dadeville. The bank is not only part of Dadeville's history; it's also part of the city's identity.

"It is so important we remember our past. Because it affects our futures," she said. "There are so many important things that people need to know about their little hometown. I think it gives them more pride in taking care of it and remembering this is what we used to be."

The Tallapoosa County Bank Building is currently offered for sale, with the intent of finding a new owner who will not only honor the history of the building, but also bring a vision to contribute to the revitalization of the Dadeville town square.