



History of the First National Bank Building

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Riverbender.com (the First National Bank building)
200 West Third Street
Built: 1925

The First National Bank building may not be the oldest structure in Alton, but the name and the financial history precedes its young age of 80 years. The bank's beginning was as the Alton Marine & Fire Insurance Company founded by B.I. Gilman and Edenezer Marsh in a building at State and Third Streets, later to become the Lincoln Hotel, now the Franklin House. In 1852, created out of the assets of the Alton Marine firm, the Alton Bank was established. Directors of Alton Bank executed a contract for the erection of a more elegant and substantial bank at the corner of Belle and Third Streets on May 13, 1854. They moved into the new building in 1855.

In 1920 c.A. Caldwell was chosen to replace Edward P. Wade as president. In the same decade, Alton National and Citizens National merged and became the second largest banking concern south of Springfield, bearing a new name: The First National Bank and Trust Company. During that decade of the roaring 1920's, the present day building was constructed, and was open to the public in October 1925. Like so many grand structures in Alton, the architectural firm chosen to erect the new building was Pfeifferberger and Sons at an estimated cost of \$100,000. The structure dominates the downtown with its seven stories facing the Mississippi River, and was recently recognized for prominently displaying the American flag which waves on the rooftop.

Like many of the structures in this old river town, it got a facelift sometime in the 1950s of 1960's. The bank was still the main banking hub for many of the citizens of Alton and Southern Illinois. Concrete covered the old brick on the front of the building blanketing the two mighty pillars which you see today. Many of the teller windows and wrought iron bars which guarded the main area of the first floor were torn out to make room for office space for a modern feel. In 2004, while undergoing another remodeling, the old columns received some renewed recognition, giving back their vintage look. Hidden deep in the many corridors of the basement, the original marble check writers were found and reconstructed to once again reside in the grand hall of the bank. Meridian Bank closed their doors to the building in 2008 and it went up for sale.

The Cities of Alton, Godfrey, and others here in the River Bend are very excited about the repurposing of this recently vacant 7 story building in downtown Alton. A building that has had a great history is on track to have even a greater future!

In October of 2009, Riverbender.com purchased this historic building and relocated their offices to the second floor. Though the growing company was in desperate need for more office space that was just the beginning of the vision John and Dawn Hentrich had for this building. As a leading media and technology company they realized they could offer so much more to the community with the help of this unique building.

The main areas of the bank have been redesigned to create a Not for Profit Educational and Entertainment complex called the Riverbender.com Community Center for use mainly by the local youth who until this time have had very limited options for social gathering and structured activities.

This historic icon, built in 1925, provides the perfect classroom for bringing our youth in touch with an inspiring place