



Amery Area Historical Society

Historical Sites



Union State Bank
1908

Union State Bank



No property in Amery's modern history has attracted as much regional and national attention as the building at 123 Keller Avenue North, which is occupied by the Byrnes Law Office. Located in the heart of the city's historic business district, this structure served as a bank for much of the 20th Century.

Originally built in 1908 to house the Farmers and Merchants State Bank, the building with a Bayfield Brownstone façade became the home of the Union State Bank following a merger of the two banks in 1930.

On Thursday, September 14, 1933, four armed Dillinger Gang henchmen surprised two officers of Union State Bank as they arrived for work. According to the Amery Free Press, Assistant Cashier Clifford Olson arrived for work as usual about 7:45 am. He parked his vehicle behind the bank, walked through Bunny Nelson's Grocery Store to the main street, and unlocked the front door of the bank.

The four masked thieves were waiting inside. They had broken into the bank through the back door before Olson arrived, and confronted

him as he entered the building. The robbers ordered him to open the vault, and they "kicked and abused Mr. Olson" because they thought he was stalling, the Free Press reported.

As the crooks forced Olson to the floor and began to empty the vault, bank Vice President Vin Christensen, also arriving for work, unlocked the back door and stepped into the building. He noticed the lock appeared to have been jimmed, but he was accosted by the thieves before he could raise any alarm. He was also forced to lie face-down on the floor.

The villains made off with \$10,000 in cash and about \$32,000 in negotiable securities. According to the Free Press, "The job was conducted rapidly and in a thoroughly businesslike manner."

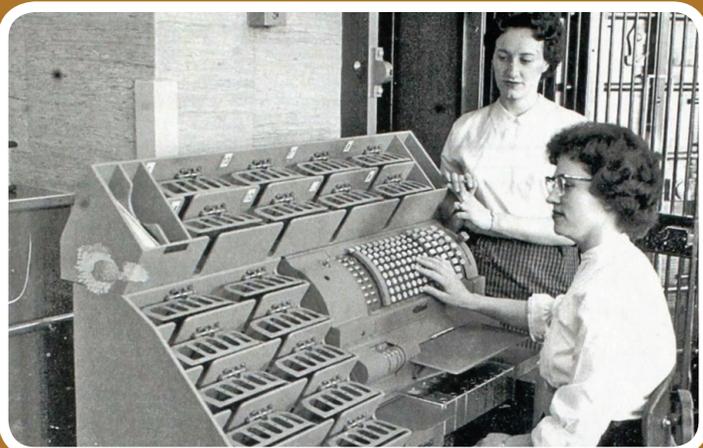
About ten years later, Clifford Olson was able to visually identify Tommy Gannon for the FBI as leader of the bank robbers. This led to confirmation that a fingerprint found at the bank was that of Gannon, and authorities sought to bring him to justice.

Gannon, meanwhile, was serving time at the Minnesota State Prison in Stillwater after being convicted of various crimes while associated with John Dillinger, Ma Barker and Alvin Karpis, all murderers and thieves operating with impunity out of St. Paul and other mid-continent locations.

The scofflaw was scheduled for release from prison on October 14, 1943, but Polk County District Attorney M.J. McDonald and Sheriff Jim Moore filed extradition papers which were signed by Minnesota Governor Edward Thye. Gannon unsuccessfully appealed the extradition and was transported to the Polk County Jail to await trial.

After an unsuccessful jailbreak attempt in early March of 1944, Gannon's trial began on Monday, April 17. Witnesses included Clifford Olson, Vin Christensen, and a fingerprint expert from Washington, D.C. On Thursday, April 20, the jury returned a verdict of guilty, and he was sentenced to 15 to 40 years at Waupun prison.

Gannon Trial for Union State Robbery Attracts Wide Interest



Asked if he had anything to say before sentencing, the Free Press reported that Gannon said, "I request that the judge retire to his chambers and blow his corrupt brains out."

Compared to these colorful anecdotes, the remainder of the Union State Bank's history is relatively mundane. The recorded history of the property begins with a patent issued to Dudley C. Hall in 1857 for 34 acres of land. It would eventually become part of the property platted by the Sault Ste. Marie Land and Improvement Company in 1884, prior to the arrival of the Soo Line Railroad three years later.

A portion of the Hall property became Lot 5, Block 5, part of the City of Amery. Incorporators of the land company were civic leaders in the Twin Cities including William D. Washburn, John Martin, Henry T. Welles, John A. Pillsbury and Thomas Lowry.

After several real estate sales and foreclosures, Lots 5 and 6 were sold by Edward J. and Ida M. Schneider to H.T. and Maggie Lund, who conveyed the property to Farmers and Merchants State Bank. The bank was granted a license in 1905. Incorporators included J.G. Burman, H.J. Sloper, Charles J. Oakley and 26 others. Construction of the current building was completed in 1908. Lot 6 to the south was later sold for construction of a clothing store.

The Union State Bank opened its doors on July 3, 1918 and was originally located at the northeast corner of Keller Avenue and Birch Street. In later years the building was the home of Fennern Jewelers, and was then demolished in 2012 to make way for expansion of Chet Johnson Drug. President of the new bank was J.G. Burman, who previously was president of the Farmers and Merchants bank.

A merger of Union State Bank and Farmers and Merchants State Bank was completed in the fall of 1930, taking the newer bank's name and moving into the older bank's building at 123 Keller Avenue North. President of the merged bank was, of course, J. G. Burman.

During the Great Depression in the 1930's, Union State Bank became associated with the Otto Bremer Company of St. Paul, MN. In 1966 it moved to a new building at 104 Maple West. Its name changed to First American Bank and later to Bremer Bank.

Gannon Given 15 To 40 at Waupun

Following the move in 1966, the former bank building was purchased by Buchanan and Harris, Inc., owned by Arch Buchanan and Leonard "Bud" Harris. The building was converted to a shoe store in conjunction with B & B Clothing, located next door at 121 Keller Avenue North. Jeff Harris ran the shoe store. Pat Donatell and Arlan Lee operated a shoe repair business at the same location. The sale included a covenant that prohibited use of the building for any type of banking institution for 25 years.

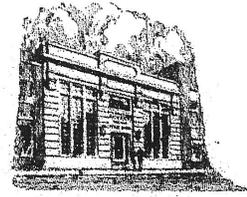
In 1977 the property was sold to Bernie Reiter, who in turn sold it to Dale and Verlene Johnson in 1980. In 1985, the building was sold to Steve and Pattie Dahl and became the home of AMCI Computers. The building and the computer business were sold to Doug and Nancy Drake in 1991, and they in turn sold AMCI Computers to Marshall Anderson in 2014. In early 2016, the property became home to the Byrnes Law Office.

Research for brochure by Jerry Sondreal, Arlen Burke, Dick Olson & Doug Drake



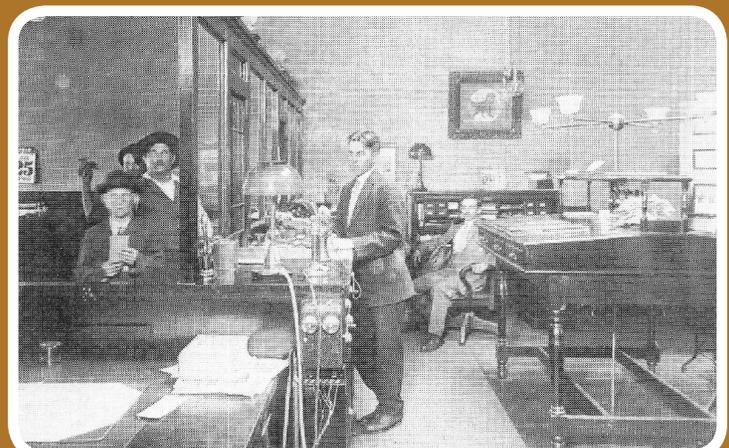
IF IT TAKES A DETECTIVE

... to find all the places around the house you've hidden money, you're running the risk of having it stolen and you're losing the interest your money would earn every year in the bank. Each and every savings account at the bank is insured up to \$10,000 — one more good reason for you to open your own personal UNION STATE BANK savings account.



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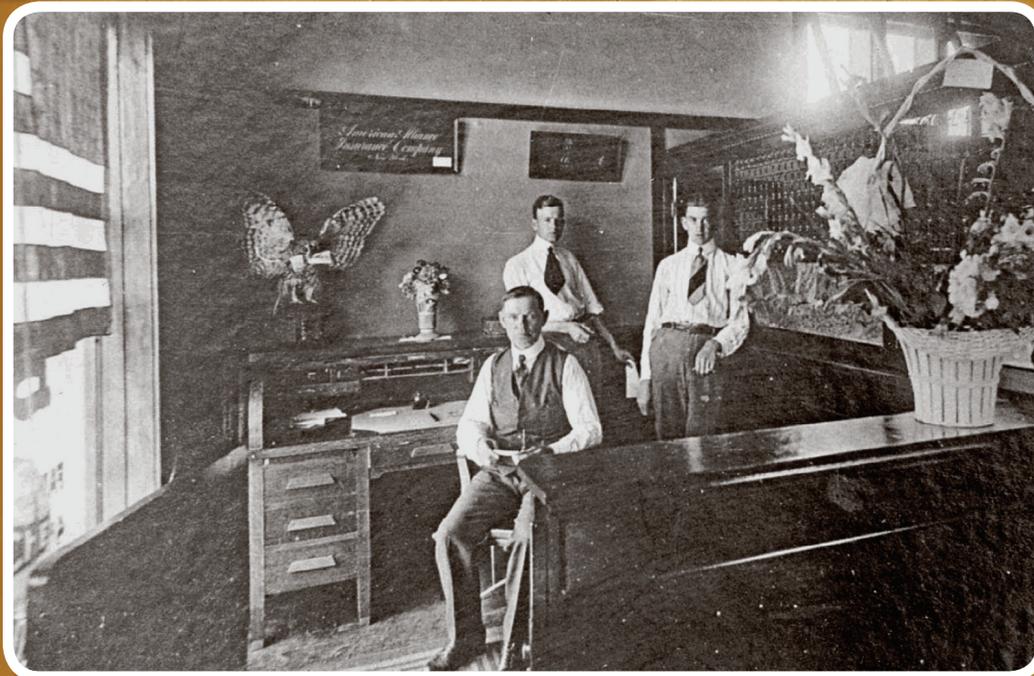
The Amery Area Historical Society (AAHS)
collects and preserves the heritage of the local area.



This historic site brochure is an activity of the
Cathy Haug Memorial Project of the AAHS.



The AAHS welcomes your participation
as donors and members.



Amery Area Historical Society
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(lower level of the Amery Area Public Library)