

JUNE 2011

Historical Edition
Harmon Playfield
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PARAGOULDS

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MAKING WHAT IS OLD NEW AGAIN

-Harry Truman Moore

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COVER STORY

Harry Truman Moore

By Karole A. Risker

H.T. Moore walked by the historic National Bank of Commerce building three times in one night during the Art and Stroll event downtown in 2008. Thinking that it would be a great building to restore, he talked to the then current owner who was using the building as a title company. The owner happened to be in the process of selling and planning to retire, and so sold the 5,000 square foot structure to H.T. who began to turn it into a beautifully restored building that now houses his law office. In just over a year the space was restored, taking down partitions, professionally cleaning and restoring the original terrazzo floor which hints at the original bank teller area, and even mixing paint seven times to find the correct shades for the building's interior. H.T. relied on the Arkansas Historic Preservation Society and the Main Street organization and accepted their suggestions on the renovations, an easy thing to do, H.T. says, when they both "went in the same direction" with the project. When he could H.T. used local contractors and workmen to renovate the space. "It was built to last," said H.T., adding that workmen had to use an 18-inch drill bit to blast through part of the building. The walls upstairs are 14 inches thick and the window frames were lead. "It is extremely well built." H.T. left the guard rail above the building's entrance as it was. It was there that a security guard sat with a shotgun in the days when the building served as a bank. Today, that space is occupied by his wife, Linda Lou, an etiquette consultant, who ascends the spiral staircase to tend to her work.

H.T. plans to add a piano downstairs to enhance the many gatherings the couple hosts there. So far, they have held functions for Governor Beebe, Senator Blanche Lincoln, and Attorney General Dustin McDaniel. In addition, they have held Rotary functions and parties for private groups.

Restoring the old NBC building was simply the latest in a series of events and projects that H.T. has had his hand in over his lifetime. The lawyer was at one time a journalist who reported on the Beatles when they came to the Walnut Ridge airport on their way to a bigger venue. He has served as a Congressional Aide, and has assisted in campaigns that have reached even the presidential level. In his varied careers, H.T. has met, with the exception of Reagan, every president from LBJ to Obama. Regretfully, he did not meet his namesake, Harry Truman, who was unable to attend a function where the two would have met. They did, however, exchange correspondence. The letters are upstairs in H.T.'s office and are simply a part of a very large collection of Truman memorabilia. H.T. also has impressive collections of campaign souvenirs, baseball photographs and other baseball-related items, a nod to his athletic days. "I started collecting before I knew I was collecting," he said.

"I have always been interested in history," said H.T. "I'm from a fourth-generation family that

came to Arkansas in 1850. My father taught eight grades in one room for \$30 a month plus room and board. On Saturday's he worked for a grocery store for \$1 a day." H.T. said that the children in his family were encouraged to read, taking three newspapers and several periodicals. His love of journalism and reading is perhaps what propelled him to be "involved in history as it happened," being both a reporter and an active participant in significant historic events, particularly those of a political nature.

In addition to meeting eight presidents and even Condoleezza Rice, H.T. and Linda Lou had the honor of having tea at the Queen of England's invitation at Buckingham Palace. He was fitted at the royal tailors and donned a top hat for the occasion; he ended up, therefore, dressed in wool despite the 87 degree temperature outside. Also in attendance at the tea was Prince Phillip, Princess Anne and Prince Charles, who made small talk with Linda Lou. "He was quite charming," she said. "Growing up in Walnut Ridge I never thought I'd sleep in the Lincoln Bedroom or have tea at Buckingham Palace," said H.T.

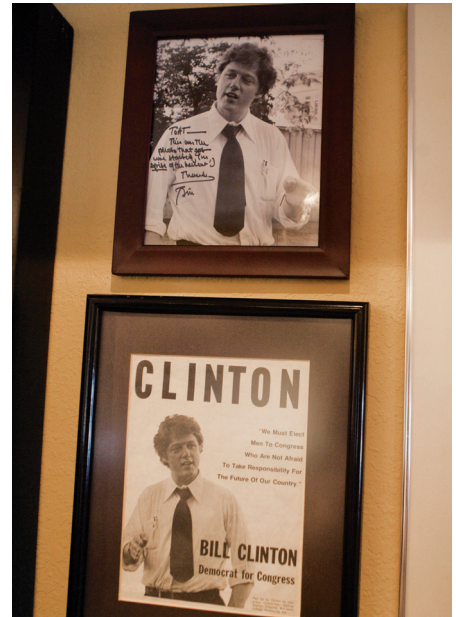
H.T. also has an avid interest in photography, a carryover from his journalism days. One of his photographs even appeared in an ad for Bill Clinton when he was running for Congress; they switched the orientation of the photograph, putting Clinton's pocket on the wrong side. In 1971 he took a picture of Governor Rockefeller's final address.

H.T. is also heavily involved in community organizations, having served in the Rotary Club, as Chamber president, on the Parks and Tourism Commission, the Fine Arts Council, as a church musician at First United Methodist Church and First Presbyterian Church, where he has played keyboard and guitar, served as past president of the Arkansas Bar, and was elected to the American Bar Association House of Delegates.

For their work on the building, H.T. and Linda Lou were recently given an award from the Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas. Given the couple's great success, the natural question is: will there be any more renovation projects? "We've done one. Let's leave it at that," said Linda Lou. ♦



Debra Walker, Linda Whiteside, secretaries



A photograph H.T. took that was used in ads



H.T.'s partial collection

The National Bank of Commerce building situated on the corner of South Pruet and Emerson Streets was built in 1923 in the classic revival style. The structure has two floors and a mezzanine, where H.T.'s office is now located. Looking across from H.T.'s window, which overlooks the entire lower floor, it is easy to spot the balcony directly across. At one time, a bank guard stood behind the rail that he accessed by ladder, and sat with a shotgun. The building still has the original storage for the guns, a long, but narrow closet near the entrance. Today, that small space upstairs is used by Linda Lou, who is an etiquette consultant.

The ceiling boasts medallions with Mercury head dimes denoting U.S. currently, and feathers representing Native American currently, a fitting tribute for the building that started as a bank.

The 5,000 square foot structure has many of its original pieces that H.T. has acquired and brought back, including the bookcases used by the predecessor law firm, two office chairs from the law firm that was once in the building that H.T. has in his office, and chairs in the entrance area. His office also has a desk from Hotel Galvez in Galveston, Texas, that was used by both Harry Truman and Howard Hughes. In addition, there is a desk from his uncle that is 100 years old. The office also holds documents from 1905, city ordinances from 1909, Arkansas Reports books from the 1870s and several old maps, one of which lists both Paragould and Parmley, the first name for the town.

The terrazzo floors have been restored and feature multiple patterns. The marble walls and ledges below the downstairs area were restored.

The paint for the walls, ceiling, and moldings were re-mixed seven times to find the correct shades for the interior of the building.

Today, the top floor has two loft apartments. At one time, the area contained J.D. Block's law offices and after the Kirch, Cathey and Brown Law Firm.