

A house well-storied

Stephen and Rhecia Brown share their home's history

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At the turn of the 20th century, citizens of Ferdinand didn't have cellphones in their pockets — they didn't even have *telephones* in their homes! So, in regard to communication, people got creative...

Stephen and Rhecia Brown own the exquisite rectangle of red brick that rests on the corner of Kunderck and Maryland streets. (Most in Ferdinand know the building as the historic, two-story home that once served as the town's first bank.) About their lovely home, the Browns (and their children, Reid and Maggie) are told many tales, and one of Stephen's favorites came from a former co-worker, whose great-great-(great?)-grandparents once lived on the upper floor of the house.

As the story goes, the lady was expecting. Every day, she watched her husband head off to work at Ferdinand Machine Shop, and she wondered — how would the working man

know when she went into labor? So, the clever lady devised a plan. She told her husband that if he looked up from the shop and saw a white sheet hanging from the upper window of the house, he should set aside his activity and run home. That would be his signal that the baby was coming!

Of course, according to Ferdinand legend, her white-sheet-communication-system worked just fine!

"It has a story to tell," praises Rhecia of the house. "It's got character. We just run into random people — and people always tell us, 'You live in that house? I was born in that house!'" She and Stephen affirm that though they never imagined they'd own the property, the home's historic significance attracted them to the building from the beginning.

The house has certainly seen its fair share of guests. Perhaps a historical account will reveal why...

John D. Timmerman purchased the land lot in 1865, probably not directly from Father Joseph Kunderck (the enterprising colonizer



A family lives here — The large foyer welcomes guests into the expansiveness of the house. Beautiful portraiture adorns nearly every surface within; there are many examples of Stephen and Rhecia's personal work. In fact, besides the exterior shot on the cover, all photographs in this feature were provided by the Browns.

and founder of Ferdinand, who died in 1857). Timmerman maintained ownership until

1905 and because of this, it is presumed that Timmerman built the original structure, which was constructed in 1875. (A cornerstone above the cellar steps marks the date.)

Frank X. Rickelman (and possibly other members of his family) had possession of the building in 1905, which is the founding date of First Bank of Ferdinand. The Rickelmans liquidated First Bank of Ferdinand in 1911.

Later, a new bank was chartered, Beckman Bank, which opened in 1923. The Rickelmans, at that time, still maintained possession of the building. (Little information remains about the

liquidation of First Bank of Ferdinand and subsequent installment of Beckman Bank.)

Documents indicate the building was listed in Nora Gutsell's name in 1944. Her husband, Dr. Gutsell, operated his medical practice on the ground level of the building. The rest of the first floor served as his family's home. At the same time, Dr. Schlegal, a dentist, lived with his family and practiced dentistry in the upper level of the building. These two doctors were connected by family, as Dr. Schlegal was Dr. Gutsell's son-in-law.

In 1947, Winifred Metzger is known to have been the owner, when she sold the house to Merrill Gehlhausen for a purchasing price of \$6,000. Later, Gehlhausen sold it to his tenants, Edgar and Ruth Gerber in 1952, at which point Mrs. Gerber operated a beauty parlor on the ground level. In 1978 the building was transferred to Kevin Gerber; then, in 1983, it was purchased by Lance Becher.

For those 36 some-odd years, between '47 and '83, the building housed multiple families, as apartments upstairs were rented out. With all the bank dealings, doctor visits, tenants and lodgers, plenty of Ferdinand folks grew to intimately know the two-story building in front of St. Ferdinand Church.

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Really quite bright — The Browns are masters at updating a space without losing its sense of tradition. Note how lovely touches of the past — a patchwork quilt, the shining radiator, an antique light fixture and an old fashioned writing desk — add seamlessly to the chic, contemporary living room.