

LAWRENCE BUSINESS MAGAZINE

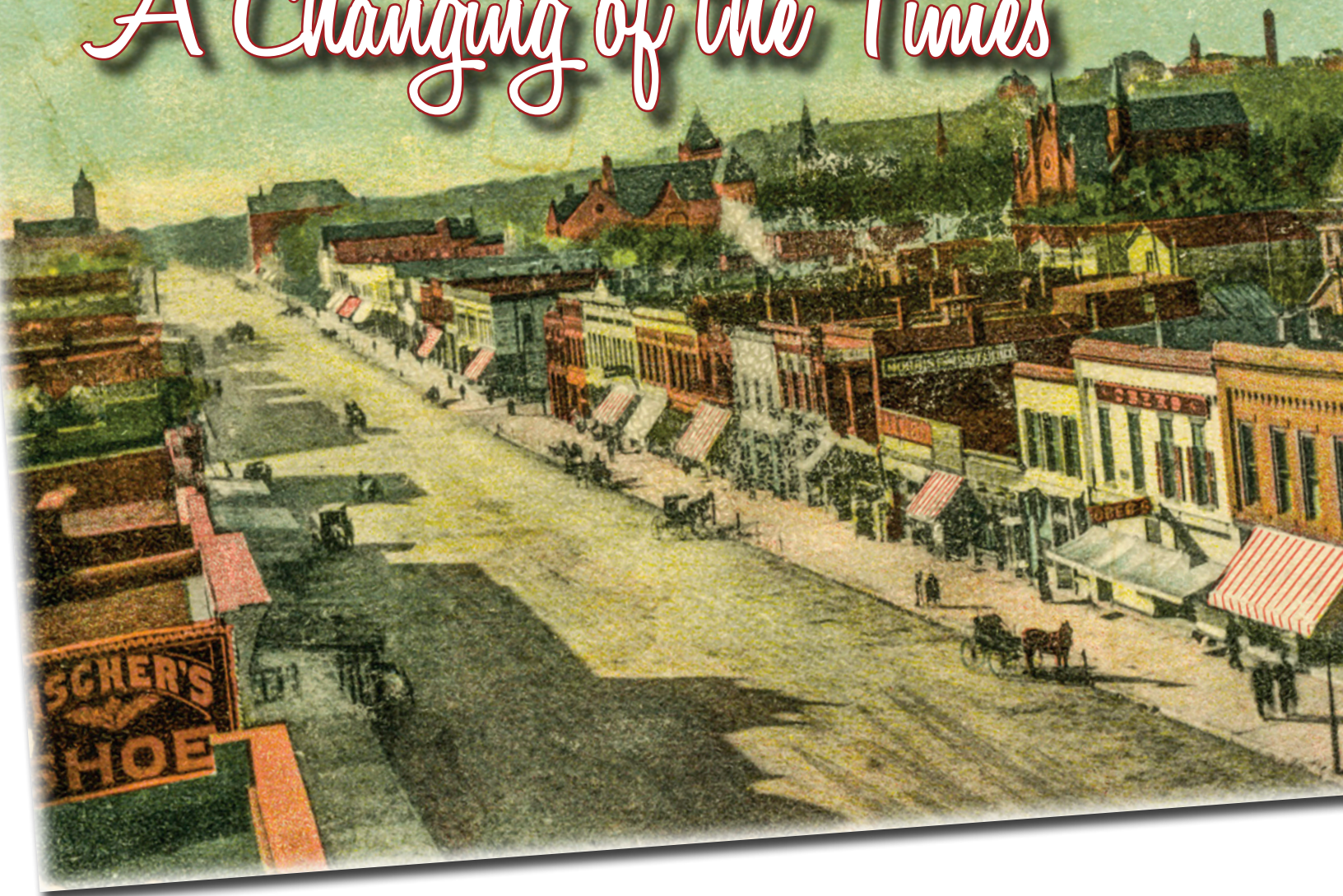
2024 Q3

OUR EVER EVOLVING
DOWNTOWN
WITH MASS STREET AT ITS HEART



Lawrence, Kans., Massachusetts Street

A Changing of the Times



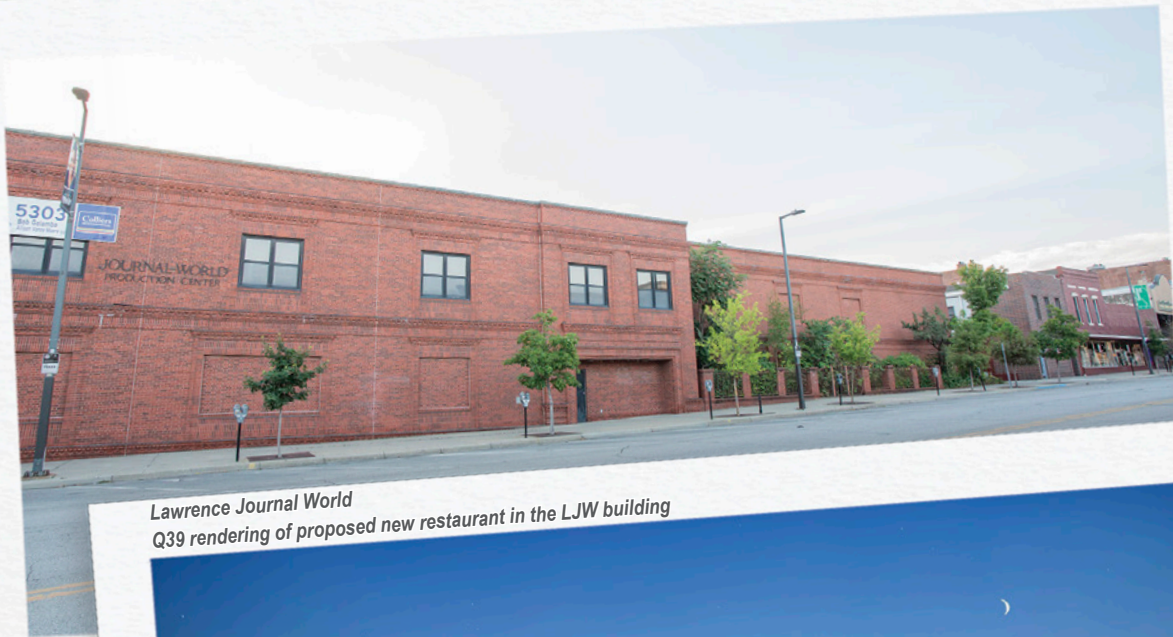
Historical buildings in Downtown Lawrence have continually been transformed through the years, morphed into whatever the community deemed necessary at that point in time.

by Bob Luder, photos by Steven Hertzog and from
Douglas County Historical Society, Watkins Museum of History

Throughout Downtown Lawrence's nearly 170-year evolution, decades-old buildings have been transformed and revamped—many several times over—to house whatever businesses have seen fit to be tenants at the time. The latest in those repurposed buildings promises big changes to downtown's north end.

Where townspeople and visitors walking the block around Massachusetts and New Hampshire streets between Sixth and Seventh might, over the course of 60 years or so, have caught whiffs of the stench of news ink and heard the roaring of presses from the local newspaper being printed and shipped, they might in the near future enjoy the sweet smells of barbecue.

Q39, a popular Kansas City barbecue restaurant, has signed on as an anchor tenant in a large redevelopment of the former Lawrence Journal-World building that, up until 2014, filled much of the space. The Lawrence location will be the franchise's third, adding to the original restaurant on 39th Street in Kansas City, Missouri, and a south location near Antioch Road and College Boulevard, in Overland Park, Kansas. It will be the major piece



Lawrence Journal World
Q39 rendering of proposed new restaurant in the LJW building



of a 70,000-square-foot development that includes office space and a 20,000-square-foot outdoor courtyard for events like concerts and game-day celebrations.

"The building is owned by a developer that owns entertainment spaces in Kansas City," says Katherine Weik, planner II for the City of Lawrence. "That area can definitely be a gateway area of downtown. It has great possibilities."

Q39 was founded in 2014 by Rob Magee, a Culinary Institute of America-trained chef who loved competing in barbecue competitions around the Kansas City area. It is one of the more popular barbecue joints in a city referred to in some circles as the "Barbecue Capital of the World."

The Q39 space will cover 8,000 square feet, owner Kelly Magee explains.

"Our family has been longtime fans of Lawrence and the vibrancy and energy that thrives on Mass. Street," Magee says. "We won't be on Mass. but close enough."

"The space is unique," she continues. "We'll have seating inside and then outside counter service for the spring and fall, along with a bar that services that area."

Magee says the kitchen at the new location will be as large as the one in Overland Park, which will allow Q39 to offer its popular catering service throughout Lawrence and Topeka.

"We feel we can pick up in that area quite a bit," she says.

The building that will house Q39 was an old warehouse, so plumbing will have to be completely built out, as well as electrical. The front portion of the building is four feet lower than the rear, and Magee says she plans on compensating with multiple levels and stairs.

She says she's hoping for a January grand opening.

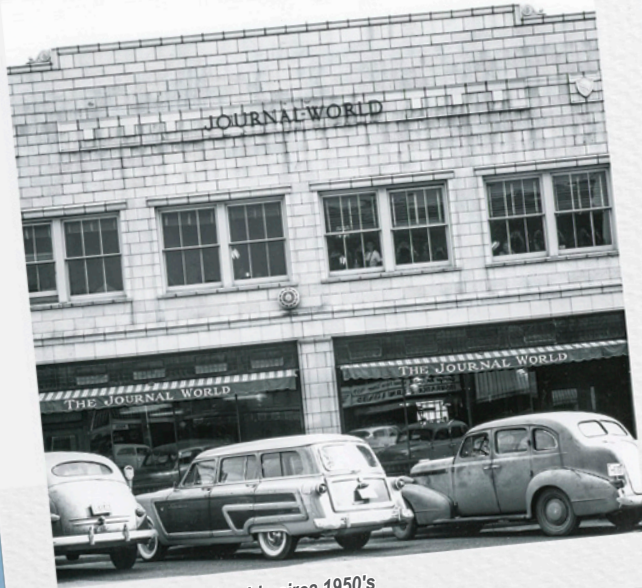
Longtime Community Staple

It's hard to imagine anything being produced out of that building other than newspapers. The Lawrence Journal-World, formed with the merger of two local papers in 1911, moved to 609 New Hampshire St. in 1955 after its original home at 722 Massachusetts St. burned to the ground in a fire that took out the Bowersock Opera House. The Journal-World expanded its building in 1984 to become a regional printing site for USA Today and expanded again in 1995 to accommodate the switch from an afternoon to a morning publication.

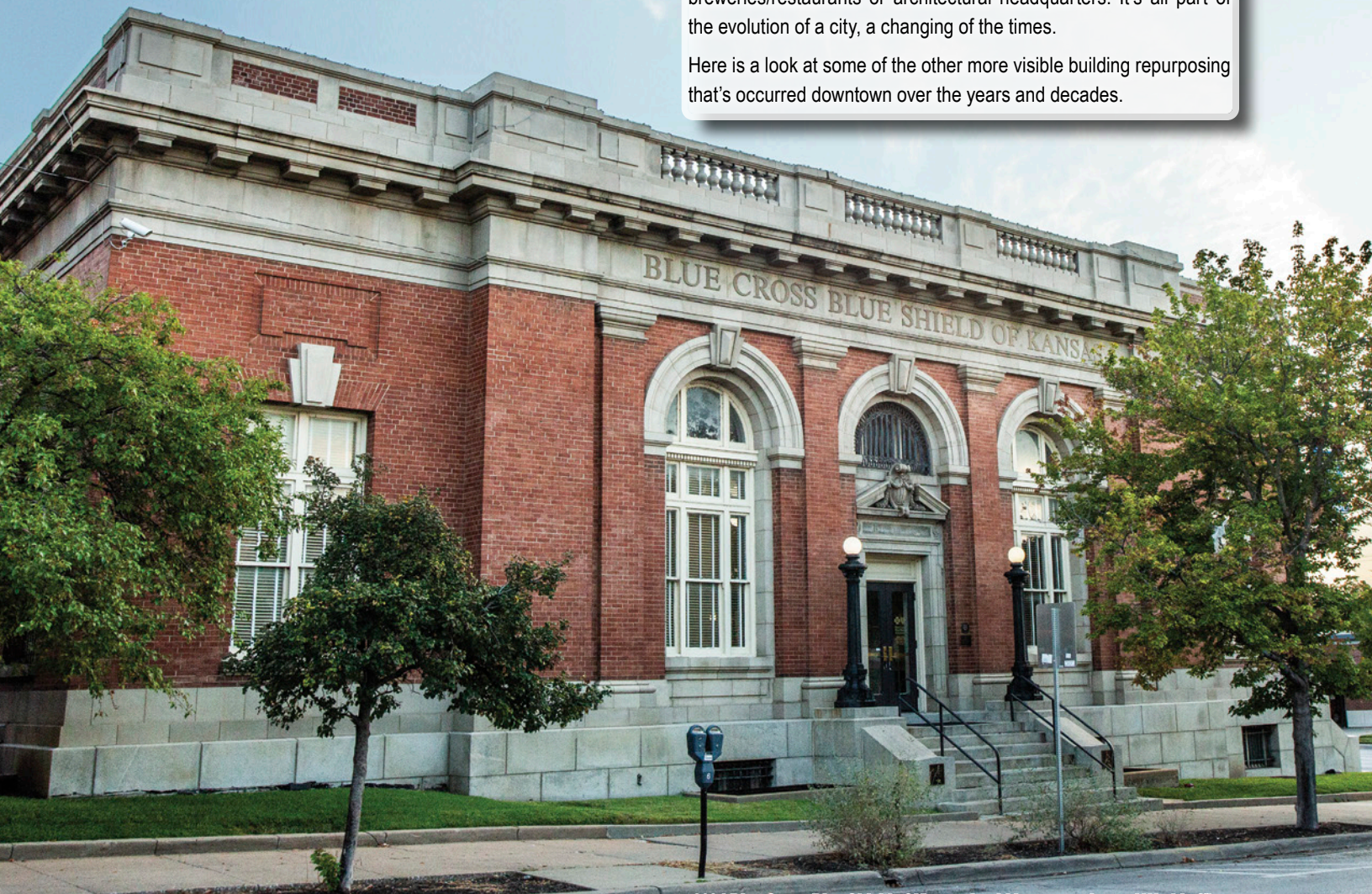
In 2001, The World Company joined its newspaper, cable TV and online resources to form a converged news operation and moved into the restored post office building at 645 New Hampshire St., giving the paper nearly the entire block. But by 2010, facing challenging changes in the communications business, the company began divesting its various holdings and moved out of its home of nearly 60 years. The 645 New Hampshire building is now emblazoned with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas which now houses one of its offices.

The Journal-World complex is just the most recent—and one of the most prominent—downtown buildings to be repurposed during Lawrence's history. Banks have been converted into restaurants, museums, even City Hall. Movie theaters have been updated to live concert venues or clothing stores. Car dealerships have become breweries/restaurants or architectural headquarters. It's all part of the evolution of a city, a changing of the times.

Here is a look at some of the other more visible building repurposing that's occurred downtown over the years and decades.



Lawrence Journal World - circa 1950's



2024 Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas in old Lawrence Journal World offices



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Filling a Need

One could say there was a bit of serendipity involved in Jeff Sigler acquiring the Capitol Federal (Cap Fed) Bank building at 1046 Vermont St. and converting it to the newest Sigler Pharmacy location. He actually approached the bank about buying the building five or six years ago but was turned away. Lines of communication remained open, however, and in 2021, Sigler learned that the bank was looking to put a location at a parcel of land he owned on Sixth Street.

At the same time, a hospital across the street from that Sixth Street locale gave Sigler more room in which to operate a pharmacy. A year later, he traded the land for the building on Vermont Street.

"The intention was to put a pharmacy downtown," Sigler says. "Years ago, there seemed to be a pharmacy on just about every corner up and down Mass. Street, but they all closed. There was a bit of a pharmacy desert downtown."

Around the same time, Sigler took over Medical Arts Pharmacy, at Fourth and Maine streets, and decided that business needed a better location. So he folded that into Sigler Pharmacy's new downtown spot.

"It made sense to move," Sigler says. "At first, I thought the space might be too big for a pharmacy. We thought of putting in a drive-up coffee shop, but city code wouldn't allow it."

Sigler decided to go with the building anyway, and it has turned out great for the company. Built around 1955, that Cap. Fed. Bank location was one of the first banks in the Midwest with a drive-through window, which made for an easy conversion to a window for pharmacy pickup.

"I didn't want (a location on) Mass. Street, because there was no parking," Sigler says. "The drive-through suited our purposes, and there was designated parking."

"It clicked all the boxes," he adds.

Sigler Pharmacy at Vermont even carries some non-food grocery items to serve the needs of shoppers who otherwise would have to travel a mile south to the Dillon's on Mass.

"It's really nice to get back downtown and try to continue (the tradition of downtown pharmacies)," Sigler says.

Jeff Sigler, owner of Sigler Pharmacy in new downtown location



The old Capitol Federal Savings building at 1046 Vermont Street



The new Sigler Pharmacy building at 1046 Vermont Street

Mass St looking north with the Granada on the left. Notice on the marquee "Elvis Presley"



The Granada 2024



The Granada 1950's



Performances of a Different Kind

The genesis of The Granada Theater actually rose from the success of another theater down the street at the time. Stanley Earl Schwahn, the four-year manager of The Patee Theater and riding the highs of its success, hit up fellow residents along Mass. Street in 1928 to raise money to build a new vaudeville theater at 1020 Mass.

Six years later, The Granada, known for its large marquee and vertical "Granada" signage, was renovated as a movie theater. It opened on Sept. 1, 1934, and the first movie shown was Robert Montgomery's comedy "The Hideout." The movie theater survived the next 55 years before the advent of suburban metroplexes provided too much competition and made it difficult for traditional downtown theaters to profit. It closed on Nov. 16, 1989.

The building again was renovated in 1993 and repurposed as a comedy club/concert venue, and remains so to this day. It has hosted some of the most famous rock, pop, country and metal bands in the world, including The Smashing Pumpkins, Ben Folds, The Flaming Lips, The Strokes and Weezer.

In 2005, one of the best-known bands from the area, The Get Up Kids, recorded Live! @ The Granada Theater.

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The old Jayhawk Motors at 1040 Vermont St



Treanor Architects at 1040 Vermont St

Know It When You See It

It's built into the DNA of architects to form a vision of any building space that comes into his or her purview. So when the team of architects at Treanor set eyes on the large expanse of the building at 1040 Vermont St. back in 2010, it immediately saw great possibilities. The building, originally constructed in 1955 to house Jayhawk Auto, later played host to Dale Willey Auto, Wild Oats Market and a Scott Rice Office Supply outlet.

"The original auto building was to the east and full of wide-open spaces," says Joy Coleman, principal at Treanor. "It had a wood truss system and roof joisting that we stripped and left visible. We added interior storm windows."

Most notably, the old, small retail front of the building was removed, and a mezzanine area was added to the north side. It included restrooms, a kitchen, a meeting room, storage spaces and other features suitable for a world-class architecture space.

"We built the addition to be two stories tall," says Coleman, who was with the company when it moved into the building in September 2012. "That gave us the opportunity for more office space upstairs with architectural studios in the first level."

The original building space was filled with open studios, she says.

"With the large open volume of the original building, it's exactly what an architectural business wants," she says. "It's a great space for sharing ideas, seeing what everyone is working on."

The repurposing of the building also included the addition of a small parking area along the north side, Coleman adds.

While Treanor, which was started by Michael Treanor as a two-man operation in 1981 in Lawrence, has its headquarters at 1040 Vermont St., the company today has branches nationwide, including Kansas City and Topeka, as well as Atlanta, Boise, Idaho, Colorado Springs, Colorado, Dallas, Denver, Lexington, Kentucky, Phoenix and San Francisco.

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Other Comings and Goings

Of course, these are just a few prime examples of buildings that were or are being repurposed.

The Granada Theater's ages-old neighbor across the street, Varsity Theater, actually opened before its neighbor way back on Oct. 26, 1926, and was equipped with a Reuter organ. But like The Granada, suburban multiplexes hurt the downtown movie business, and The Varsity showed its last movie, John Woo's "Face/Off," on Sept. 1, 1997. Today, it's an Urban Outfitters clothing store.

One of the most well-known and trafficked old buildings downtown sits at 746 Massachusetts St., where Merchants Pub & Plate has been the last several years. The building, which originally was half the width of the current 50 feet, was built by architect Verner F. Smith in the 1880s and housed Merchants National Bank. In the early 1900s, the space was occupied by a barber shop, a paint store, a wallpaper store, a restaurant and a real estate establishment. First National Bank took over the building in 1972, and it became Tellers restaurant in 1988. A unique feature of the space is that its restrooms are located inside the old bank vault.

Abe & Jake's Landing, across the street from the new Sixth and New Hampshire streets development site and, coincidentally, owned by Mike Logan, who owns The Granada, was once Consolidated Barbed Wire Co. The building now occupied by Free State Brewing Co. once was a car barn for the interurban railways. The coffee shop next door was the train station for the Kaw Valley Railway. The location where Black Stag Brewing now sits once was a car dealership, and it's believed that there remain some of the ramps used for cars to drive up to what was the second-floor showroom.

And perhaps the most prominent of the repurposed buildings in Lawrence sits at 11th and Mass. streets—the Watkins Museum of History. Originally built in 1888 to house Watkins Land Mortgage Co. and Watkins Bank became, in 1929, City Hall for the next 41 years. The city offices were moved in 1970, and the building was renovated and reopened in 1975 as a community museum.

Vestiges of the building's original use are still evident, from teller windows to the words "BANK" and "MORTGAGE" designed into the mosaic flooring, to the original stained-glass windows.

"It's still pretty clear that it was a bank," says Steve Nowak, executive director of the museum. "But it's also a building with all kinds of history that's worth preserving."

The same can be said for all of these buildings that, while serving as hosts to various different companies and purposes through the years, also serve to remind us all where downtown Lawrence has been and is going. ▲

The old Merchant Bank at 8th and Mass



The Merchants Pub & Plate 2024

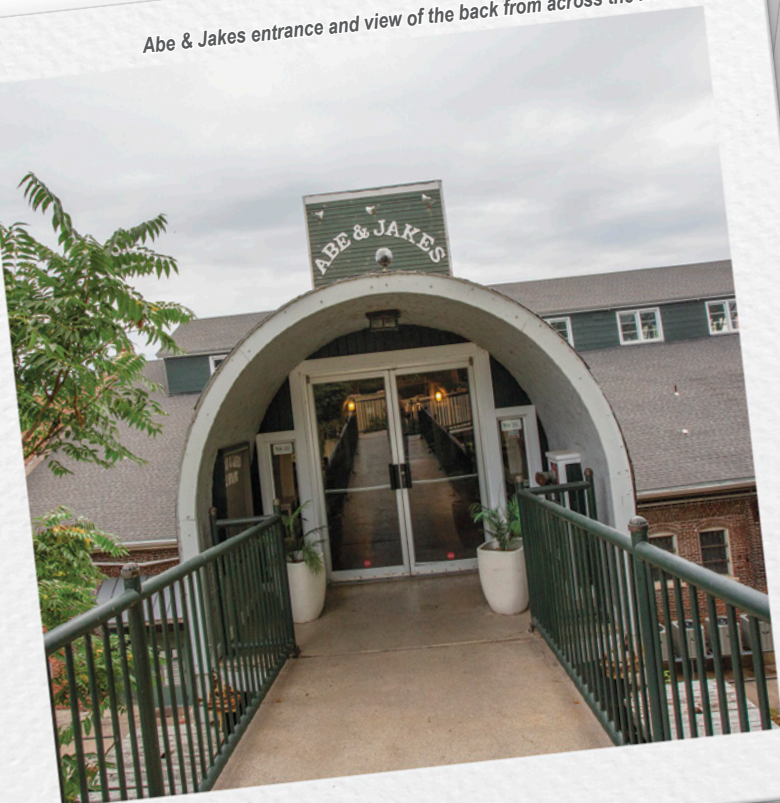




The Watkins Museum 2024
and as it once was with a trolley running down Mass St



Abe & Jakes entrance and view of the back from across the river





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