

History by Horsman: A block fit for a Kingsbury

By Tom Horsman, Sandusky Register April 14, 2021

SANDUSKY — At the northeast corner of Columbus Avenue and Washington Row stands a group of three buildings that were part of the Columbus Avenue Revitalization Project: the Commercial Banking and Trust, the Whitworth and Kingsbury buildings.



This photo shows a historical image of the southern portion of the Kingsbury Block superimposed onto a contemporary image of the current Kingsbury Building.

Photo illustration and provided photo/TOM HORSMAN and SANDUSKY LIBRARY FOLLETT HOUSE MUSEUM

These buildings contain a variety of different uses, including Sandusky City Hall, Vita, Firelands Federal Credit Union and the Columbus Avenue Lofts apartments.

The building in the middle, the Kingsbury, once had a much larger presence on this block.

The Kingsbury Block was built in 1894, and it was home to many different businesses. In the book "From the Windows Walk," it was stated, "... Dentists, doctors, lawyers, insurance companies, etc. leased the many offices on the second and third floors of the Kingsbury Block, where the terror children felt going to the dentist was tempered by the thrill of riding the elevator."

In 1913, a bad fire destroyed the market house building on West Market Street where City Hall had resided for the previous few decades. After the fire, City Hall was moved to the third floor of the Kingsbury Building for two years, until it was moved to the old police and fire station on West Market — a building we explored here a few weeks ago.

In 1920, the Kingsbury Block was sold to what would eventually become the Commercial Banking and Trust Co.

In 1922, the company began demolishing the southern portion of the Kingsbury to build a new Beaux-Arts style structure to serve as their bank building.

On the front page of the July 27, 1922, edition of the Register, an article about the new bank building stated, "In every way, the building will be one of the finest of its kind, and it has been planned so that it will meet the demand of a much larger city than Sandusky is today, for years to come." This is the building that once housed Calvary Temple and is now home to Vita and part of City Hall.

Even though the old distinctive corner and tower of the Kingsbury Block were demolished for the new bank, the northern portion of the Kingsbury still remained and was home to many different businesses throughout the years, notably the S.S. Kresge Corp. and Manhattan Clothing.

Like many buildings downtown, the Kingsbury's vibrancy waned toward the end of the 1900s, and it was plagued by vacancy and decay for many years.

In 2016, the Sandusky city commission designated the Kingsbury Block as a local Sandusky landmark. The building was subsequently restored to its former glory through a partnership of Marous Brothers, SandCity, the city of Sandusky and with the help of Ohio state historic preservation tax credits.

In 2019, Sandusky City Hall returned to the Kingsbury, just over 100 years after it had left the building previously. The Kingsbury once again proudly stands at the gateway to downtown Sandusky.

Editor's note: Tom Horsman works for the city of Sandusky's department of community development as serves on the board of trustees for the Erie County Historical Society.